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TRANSFER



LIFE
OF
ST. BENEDICT
SURNAMED
"THE MOOR,"

The Son of a Slave.

CANONIZED BY POPE PIUS VII., MAY 24th, 1807.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF M. ALLIBERT.

Canon of the Primatial Church of Lyons.

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

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TO THE SERAPHIC PATRIARCH,
ST. FRANCIS.

I CANNOT do better, O holy Patriarch,
than dedicate to thee this Abridgment
of the Life of St. Benedict, thy Son,
who now enjoys eternal happiness in
the arms of his Father. I do this the
more readily, since I need not recall thy
glory, which shines from age to age, al-
though we may celebrate it without incur-
ring the reproach of flattery, which may
usually be made against dedicatory epis-
tles. It is true, nevertheless, that the

merits of children who walk in their father's footsteps, and the glory they win, always redound to the father's greater honor. Our Saint is a striking proof of this. When we read that the countenance of St. Benedict of Sanfratello became bright and shining when he was in prayer, during the night, we are immediately reminded of the wonderful brightness thou didst shed around thee, in so much, that the cell in which thou wast praying seemed all on fire, and the deceived beholders ran in haste to extinguish the flames. The same may be said of those fundamental virtues, by which our Saint walked in thy blessed footsteps, tinged with the blood of those seraphic wounds which had pierced his heart also. Thou wast accustomed, during prayer, to take refuge under the wings of St. Michael the Archangel. St. Benedict was faithful to the same practice.

That we may not make too many comparisons, we shall content ourselves with recalling his veneration for the ecclesiastical hierarchy which he had drawn from thy Testament, in which thou dost say, speaking of the sacerdotal order:—*“It is my desire to fear the priests, to love and honor them as my superiors. I am unwilling to see any sin in them, because in each I consider the Son of God, and regard them as my masters.”*

What may render this Abridgment still more agreeable to thee, O venerable Father, is, that thy son Benedict zealously applied himself to imitate and honor thee perfectly; I, then, enter into his views by dedicating to thee this short account of his life, composed on the occasion of his canonization. There is, then, reason to hope that it will be agreeable to both father and child; happy shall I be, if I

obtain hereby, from either, that protection which I, with all the reformed religious, implore, prostrate at thy feet.

F. JACQUES.

Postulator-General.



APPROBATION

By the order of the most reverend Master of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, I have read the Life of St. Benedict of Sanfratello, surnamed the Moor: not only have I found therein nothing contrary to the holy Catholic faith or to good morals, but I have been led to admire the order and clearness with which the author has drawn the picture of the heroic virtues and excellent gifts which our Lord had so generously poured out on the soul of his servant. Consequently, I judge the publication of this work conducive to the spiritual good of the faithful.

Convent of the Minerva, the 3d of August, 1805.

FR. THOMAS M. MANCINI,

Of the Order of Preachers, Professor of Theology, and Consultor of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

PERMISSION OF THE ORDINARY.

WE, Vicar-General of his Grace the Archbishop of Amasia, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Lyons, having read the manuscript entitled "Life of St. Benedict of Sanfratello," translated literally from the Italian by M. Allibert, Canon of Lyons; having seen the very respectable approbations already given the work; after the testimony of a theologian as pious as enlightened, who has read this translation, and has judged its publication useful to the faithful, do permit the Life of St. Benedict of Sanfratello to be given for publication.

CHOLLETON, *Vicar-General.*

LYONS, January 30, 1835.



LIFE OF
ST. BENEDICT OF SANFRATELLO,
SURNAMED THE NEGRO.

CHAPTER I.

COUNTRY, PARENTS, AND BIRTH OF ST. BENEDICT.

UR Saint was born at Sanfratello, in Sicily, on the northern coast near the Tyrrhene Sea, which place was formerly known under the name of Château de St. Philadelphus. We think this name dates back to the translation into that place of the relics of three holy martyrs, Alpheus, Philadelphus and Cirinus. By an idiomatic change, the name St. Philadelphus

has become Sanfratello. Christopher, our Saint's father, and Diana, his mother, were descended from negro slaves; they were themselves negroes and born at Sanfratello; both were Christians, adorned with evangelical virtues. According to the Chronicle of the Reformed Friars Minor, the mother was free; this benefit she doubtless owed to the Chevalier de Lanca, whose slave she had been. After her marriage with Christopher, she took with him the name of Manasseri, their master, according to the custom of the slaves. Vincent Manasseri, who was rich, entrusted to Christopher the cultivation of his fields and the care of his flocks, and the slave's fidelity found its recompense in the affection and confidence of his grateful master.

Although Christopher was endowed with many good qualities, he excelled in love of the poor; following the example of the

saints, he never refused alms to any one, and he gave so much the more generously, as he attached to the merit of charity the benediction which our Lord deigned to shed on the goods confided to his care. But his companions, animated by a contrary spirit, not content with turning his alms to ridicule, and blaming them as more injurious than advantageous to Manasseri's interests, denounced Christopher as a waster of the goods he administered. That prudence which examines accusations by the light of judgment and wisdom is very rarely found in the world. The jealousy of the accusers seemed to their master a well-founded zeal; and he deprived the slave of his office of superintendent. But far from increasing his revenues by this means, as he had hoped, he found them diminishing day by day; his flocks decreased, his out-houses became in a ruinous condition; the pro-

ducts of his fields, formerly so plentiful, grew visibly less, and his revenues far below what they had formerly been. It is but just to say that Manasseri was not one of those, who, disdaining to occupy themselves with the primary cause of events, attribute them always to secondary causes. Being a true disciple of the Gospel, he recognized his error, reinstated Christopher in his office, and, consequently, in the position of giving his alms; from that time abundance and the blessing of Heaven returned to him.

Among other moral virtues, our Saint's parents possessed chastity in an eminent degree; this virtue, always admirable, is much more so in persons of their class. To their love of purity was joined a repugnance to having children in their state of servitude; hence, by mutual consent, they lived separate. Their master hearing this,

and being assured of it by themselves, wished to remove one of the causes, and promised that he would declare free the first fruit of their marriage. Influenced by this promise, the pious couple consented to live together. God blessed their resolution; Diana conceived; and, during the time of her pregnancy, she incessantly recommended her child to God and also to the Blessed Virgin, to whom she, as well as her husband, had a great devotion.

According to the opinion of several writers, the child was born in 1524; he was baptized in the Church of Sanfratello, and received the name of Benedict. Manasserì gave him for god-father William Pontremoli, one of his relations, and the child being black, like his parents, he became commonly called by the name of Benedict the Negro. But under this dark exterior he possessed gifts which won him

everybody's love, so that, observing his happy natural disposition, every one applied to him the words of the Spouse of the Canticles: *I am black, but beautiful*. Manasseri kept his promise, and immediately declared the child free; happy presage of that child's future consecration to God alone, who had chosen him for Himself, and had destined him solely for His service.





CHAPTER II.

ST. BENEDICT'S CHILDHOOD.

A BEAUTIFUL flower exposed to the rays of a sweet and beneficent light, and carefully cultivated, develops its charms from day to day, and sheds around it a delicious perfume ; thus it was with the youthful Benedict. We may easily understand what was his education, in his tenderest years, if we consider the piety of his parents, and even of their master, and the assiduous care they bestowed on this child of benediction. His beautiful soul, the object of the special predilection of the Most High, cultivated by holy instructions and virtuous examples, developed itself day by day, and formed itself upon the model

of his father and mother, and according to the heart of God. The devotion, recollected deportment, and obedience of the little negro excited general admiration; again we are told that he, from his earliest years, advanced in the spiritual life, and that he was regarded as one already enlightened in the ways of God, and eminently virtuous.

The inhabitants of Sanfratello beheld with emotion, the good Christopher and his pious wife conducting their child regularly to the foot of the Holy Virgin's altar, where he, with as much fervor as innocence, offered himself and the homage of his liberty, and supplicated the Queen of Angels not to permit him to fall into the horrible slavery of the demon. Benedict, with as much ardor as humility, united in the prayers of his parents; with his whole heart he repeated the tender aspirations sug-

gested by his mother. At this touching spectacle, Manasseri could not restrain his tears, remembering that he had contributed to this work from which God, it seemed, would draw so much glory. Manasseri was not the only admirer of Benedict; whoever attentively regarded his gravity and conduct, conceived the hope that, in him, the heavenly city should have one more inhabitant. The result showed that they were not deceived.

Our Saint, like another Tobias, gave, even in his tenderest years, no sign of childishness or levity; like his virtuous parents, he advanced with joy and courage, in the evangelical way; like them, he practised fasts and mortifications, and frequently approached the sacraments; consequently, the purity of his morals condemned libertines and covered them with confusion, while it animated the good and

fervent. Neither public praises nor felicitations, nor the caresses of Manasseri himself, could inspire the holy youth with thoughts of vanity. Another in his place, would have wished to profit by the general esteem, and, above all, by the benevolence of the wealthy master, who had given him his liberty, to improve his condition. This would have been only natural, for we daily see shepherds, workmen, and servants setting great value on being the first, and having power over others; but the young Benedict, free from ambition, kept his flocks, contented himself with frugal fare, employed his hours of rest in pious exercises, and had no other guides but the law of God and the wishes of his parents. What does greater honor to the young negro is, that, with his ready mind and lively imagination, he thought so little of advancing himself, and engaging in a less painful state, that, having attained

his eighteenth year, and being possessed of the necessary strength and vigor for the most laborious occupations of a farmer, he esteemed himself happy in that condition. Being master of his own wages, he purchased a pair of oxen, and engaged in agriculture; thus he became, in the supernatural order, another protector of that honorable and useful profession. Worthy rival of St. Isidore in his birth, he imitated him, also, by glorifying God in the same condition. If the holy Spaniard, while guiding the plough in the fields watered by the Tagus, always kept his heart elevated to God, our saintly Sicilian, while cultivating the lands of Valdemone, ceased not to bless the all-powerful hand which draws man's food from nothingness, and preserves, in a manner so constant and admirable, the fruits of the earth, for the benefit of his creatures. Hence, when the rain moist-

ened the earth, when the rays of the sun caused the seed to sprout, or when a gentle wind dried the furrows of the fields, Benedict always returned thanks to the Author of nature.

In the short intervals of rest, he used to raise his eyes towards heaven, and in those moments of delight, he appeared to enjoy a foretaste of the blessed life ; the peace of his soul was reflected on his countenance, and amidst his poverty, he found all he wished of worldly goods, and possessed in a high degree that true happiness which worldlings neither know nor desire. The hard bread he eat, the wild fruits he found in the fields, were more savory to him than would have been the delicious viands that loaded the sumptuous tables of Lucullus and Vetellius.



CHAPTER III.

ST. BENEDICT IN THE HERMITAGE.

AT the time of which we speak, Father Jerome Lanza, originally of St. Mark's, occupied, with several of his brethren, the hermitage of St. Dominic, a short distance from Sanfratello. This father was a knight allied on the maternal side to Cardinal Rebiba, a Sicilian. With the consent of his wife, he had retired into a monastery, had sold his rich patrimony, and abandoning his country, had finally established himself in the hermitage, where he imitated the angelic life of the ancient solitaries of Egypt. One day, as he was walking in the country, he cast his eyes upon some reapers who were resting, and amusing themselves, in the

meantime, at Benedict's expense; they were even indecently mocking him. Lanza, having for a few moments attentively regarded the negro, who was then about twenty-one years old, discovered under that black exterior a soul of extraordinary purity, and said to the reapers: "You are ridiculing this poor workman, but in a few years you will hear something of him." Those uncultivated laborers listened with astonishment to the words of such a venerable personage; those words remained deeply engraven on Benedict's heart, although he did not comprehend their meaning: not so his master, who understood it perfectly, especially when the good hermit added to him: "I recommend the young Benedict to you, for he will first come to live with us, and afterwards become a religious."

Some time later, Lanza, meeting Benedict in the fields, said to him: "Benedict,

what are you doing there? Sell your oxen and come to my hermitage." The young man obeyed, and although he was fond of his little team, which he had purchased at the price of his sweat, he heard the hermit's voice as that of Jesus Christ, sold his oxen, and gave the price to the poor. Then he asked his parents for the required permission, which they gave with their benediction, weeping, meanwhile, with joy and emotion, and Benedict set out immediately for St. Dominic's hermitage; there, consumed with zeal, he placed himself under the guidance of his master. Thus Benedict gave an earnest of his future sanctity by his prompt obedience and ready correspondence to grace.

Scarcely had the good hermits beheld Benedict at the feet of Father Jerome, ere they conceived the most happy hopes of him. The Holy See had permitted them

to profess the rule of St. Francis, and add thereto a fourth vow of perpetual Lenten abstinence, and three days' fast every week. Hence they had obtained the faculty of receiving novices, giving them the habit, and admitting them to profession, after a year's novitiate. Thus commenced that new and rigorous institute. Certainly, those rules were calculated to lead them to an eminent perfection; everything in them was conformable to the most austere penitence; their food was confined to hard and coarse bread, begged in the country; sometimes they added thereto a few herbs and vegetables badly prepared; they drank only water; their cells were small, badly built, and incommodious; their clothing was suited to the poverty they professed, and was insufficient to preserve them from the inclemency of the weather; they spent the greater part of the day and night in

prayer; they enjoyed no agreeable society, and to all this, they added manual labor. A life so austere, rendered them objects of holy astonishment to the inhabitants.

The novice Benedict, although among the last, was the first to attain the end. He learned from each of his brethren lessons of sublime virtue, and like a river, which in its course receives one brook, then another, until, enriched by so many streams, it overflows its banks and fertilizes the fields, he surpassed all his companions in solitude; they respected him as an angel on account of his truly angelic virtues; thus he became their chief and their model. Even this extraordinary kind of life could not satisfy his exalted views, and his inexpressible ardor for acquiring those heavenly treasures inaccessible to moths and thieves. In his laudable ambition, he ran in spirit over the deserts of

Nitria, Syria, and the Thebaide, to learn the wonderful penances of the most austere anchorets. He discovered that St. Paul, the first hermit, had worn only a tunic of palm leaves, which St. Anthony afterwards inherited. Benedict would make such a garment for himself, to which he added a woollen capouche; he thought this would be a sufficient precaution against the rigors of winter, but the intensity of the cold obliged him to add another garment to his dear tunic, which he never cast away.

In virtue of the apostolic brief, our Saint, after a year's novitiate, made his profession in this austere institute. From that time, he redoubled his macerations, mortification of the senses, prayers, and above all, his love for God, which wonderfully inflamed him. To a profound humility and contempt of himself, which he opposed

to his superior's delight and his companion's praises, he added blind obedience and rigorous observance of the rule. His fasts became continual, and the ground was his only bed. His countenance bore the imprint of candor, modesty, and penance. He frequently chastised his body, even to blood. His quest of the hard bread, which, with some herbs, constituted his food, caused him to acquire abundant treasures of patience, by the affronts he received from some persons, who regarded the voluntary poor of Jesus Christ as vagabonds and idlers, and who were not able to distinguish between vice and virtue

St. Anthony, Abbot, and other anchorets were accustomed to change their residence, as much to go courageously to combat with the enemy of their salvation, as to triumph the more readily over him by the continual pains of long journeys over rough and diffi-

cult ways. They also found therein matter for sacrifice, by leaving their country and renouncing the conveniences they had acquired even in their solitudes. In imitation of this example, St. Benedict and his companions, under the conduct of Father Jerome Lanza, their superior, quitted the Hermitage of St. Dominic in the province of Val Demone, and passing into that of Val di Mazzara, traversed Sicily from north to south, since the river which bears the name of Sanfratello discharges its waters into the Tyrrhene Sea, and the rivers of Platano and Rifesio, near which our hermits arrived, flows into the African Sea. Our solitaries took up their abode in a hermitage near Cattolica, where they lived for eight years, as our Saint himself told his friend, John Dominic Rubbiano. Among other inconveniences presented by this solitude, the roads were almost impassable,

when they wished to go in quest of necessary nourishment for their bodies, enfeebled by fasting, or to walk or take some recreation. Father Jerome and his religious were laymen ; in this they imitated those ancient solitaries, who, before the year 385, in which Pope Siricus sat in the Chair of St. Peter, were not ecclesiastics, although they were superiors and abbots. In their new retreat, the hermits were deprived of the advantages they had enjoyed in their first desert, which took its name from the Church of St. Dominic, near which it was situated.

After eight years, those servants of God, returned from the southern coast to that of the Tyrrhene Sea, but at great distance from the place in which they had first dwelt. This hermitage, twenty-six leagues from Sanfratello, was called Mancusa in Partenica, near Carini, five leagues from Palermo. Thither our Saint retired with his brethren,

into caves that had been inhabited by wild beasts, to apply themselves to prayer, and conceal, at the same time, their long vigils, their fasts and penances, not less severe than continual. But the shadows of night were dissipated and gave place to the aurora. It was said that the famished wolves, which are very numerous in that desert, respected the negro's grotto, although it was in the most exposed place; the people of Carini began to speak of him with veneration as of a saint. Drawn by confidence in his merits, they began to visit his retreat and implore his succor in their maladies. God, who wished to be known in His servant, blessed the people's faith by operating a thousand cures, and bestowing many graces. The sanctity of our saint began to shine abroad. Once, when, through obedience, he went to Carini, he met a poor woman long afflicted with

cancer in the breast, which all human remedies had failed to cure. Knowing Benedict's virtue, she said: "O servant of God, in thy charity, make the sign of the cross on my disease, which is incurable." Compassion did violence to our Saint's humility; he elevated his mind and heart to heaven, made the sign of the cross, as the sick woman had requested, and she was healed.

The fame of this miracle recalled other graces obtained by the prayers of Brother Benedict; the whole country resounded with his name, and the concourse to the grotto increased so much, that the prayers and retirement of the good hermits were interrupted. Hence, after having fulfilled the obligations of patience and charity in regard to the inhabitants of Carini, the hermits, seeing that they abused it, judged proper, in concert with their superior, to abandon that spot, and seek elsewhere that

cherished solitude which was the basis of their institute. The choice of a new hermitage was speedily made, on account of the proximity of Mount Pellegrino, which seemed to invite our solitaries to conceal, in its wild thickets, the virtues and austere penances by which those servants of God adorned their souls, and rendered them more agreeable to their Divine Master.





CHAPTER IV.

ST. BENEDICT ON MOUNT PELLEGRINO.

ABOUT a league from the celebrated city of Palermo, rises, majestically, Mount Pellegrino, formerly known under the name of Ereta or Erta. At the foot of the mountain there is excellent water, the medicinal virtues of which are attributed to the mines through which it flows. But what renders it most distinguished is that there is the tomb of St. Rosalia; this fact was not known at the time of which we speak; it was discovered one hundred years after the birth of our Saint, on the 15th of July, 1624, while the pestilence was raging in Palermo. Its devastations ceased through the invocation of the Saint. The people of

Palermo, in gratitude, erected a statue of St. Rosalia on the summit of the mountain facing the sea; this statue is so immense that the sailors can perceive it from the sea, and they salute it as that of their patroness. In the time of our Saint, it was only known by tradition where the holy virgin had retired, and in particular, the grotto in which she had dwelt; all Sicily held this sanctuary in veneration. According to the Roman Martyrology, Saint Rosalia was descended from Charlemagne; she lived towards the end of the twelfth century, in solitude, on Mount Pellegrino, hiding her virtues and penance from the eyes of the world. Our Saint and his companions followed their Superior along this venerated mountain, and stopped on a plain covered with shrubs, which formed a thicket, directly opposite St. Rosalia's grotto, which was then uninhabitable and entirely closed. The

holy hermits built for themselves, on a rock near the holy grotto, little cells like those of the first solitaries of Egypt. They were very anxious to have also a small chapel for divine service; such as the disciples of Pachomius and Hilarion had, but whence were to come the means? From Divine Providence, which, watching over those poor ones of Jesus Christ, wished to realize their just desires. The Duke of Medina-Cæli, then Viceroy of Sicily, and his pious consort, won by the sanctity of those good hermits, and especially by the well-established reputation of Brother Benedict's virtues, caused a little chapel to be erected at their expense, contiguous to the venerated grotto, in which they placed a picture of Saint Rosalia, that the solitaries might contemplate the image of their holy patroness. They then caused little separate cells to be constructed all around the chapel, for the

servants of God. The ruins of these are still to be seen; they show the cell of Father Lanza and that of our Saint, which are on the western side of the hill, opposite the grotto of the holy penitent. In conferences with his Superior and brethren, Benedict learned that the Apostle St. Paul, being at the house of Aquila and Priscilla, made tents for the soldiers; whence he says in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: *Neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing, but in labor and in toil we worked night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you.* He also learned that we read in St. Epiphanius that the monks were like bees; they put their hand to the wax, and their mouth to the honey, by singing the praises of God; that St. Jerome wrote to the monk Rusticus: "In the monasteries of Egypt they have the laudable custom of subsisting only by the fruits of their labor,

not so much because of their want of resources, as for the salvation of their souls, for fear of giving entrance to bad thoughts; and to escape idleness, that formidable enemy so much detested by the Fathers of the Church, and which the very pagans held in horror." Also that St. Chrysostom says, in the twenty-ninth homily on St. Matthew: "Youth which has leisure to satisfy its curiosity in games and festivities, is accustomed to rebel, and becomes more ferocious than the beasts;" and finally, that St. Bernard says, in the Second book of Considerations: "*One cannot be too much on one's guard against idleness; we must fly from it as being the source of vanity and the tomb of virtues.*" Penetrated with these holy maxims, our Saint, after the example of his Seraphic Father, divided his time between interior exercises of piety and manual labor. Like the rest of his brethren, he made baskets

and brooms, without ever relenting from his ardor for prayer, passing, like the Apostle, from exterior occupations to recollection, and the most perfect exercises of the spirit and the heart.

Our Lord having called to himself Father Jerome Lanza, the Superior of those holy solitaries, our Saint was immediately elected in his place, with as much satisfaction to the community as pain to Benedict's humility. The prudence of his government was proportionate to the eminence of his virtue. He gave the habit to a man named Gargano, originally of Paula in Calabria, who took the name of Brother Francis; he was a man of pure morals and solid virtue. The new Superior spent some time with him, in the convent of Diana, in Marincò near Montreal, and then returned to his dear solitude at Mount Pellegrino. There they dwelt until Pope Julius III, in 1550, the

first year of his pontificate, desired them to leave their particular cells, to live together in a monastery that had been built for them near the church, by some pious souls; of this monastery some vestiges still remain. Things remained in this condition under the pontificates of Marcellus II and Paul IV.

Pius IV, being seated on the chair of St. Peter in 1559, was informed of the austerities practised **by** those hermits; he dispensed them from the fourth vow of perpetual Lenten abstinence and then of the three days' weekly fast. Afterwards thinking, perhaps, that the waters, by prolonging their course, are sometimes troubled, he ordered that each of those solitaries might accomplish his vows in any convent he should choose. The first cause of Pius IV's wish is to be attributed to the will of the Almighty, who wished to draw Benedict's virtue forth from obscurity, to place it on a

candlestick, that it might shine over all the world. Our Saint knew not, at first, which of the Franciscan orders to choose. His first idea was to enter among the order of the Capuchins, which he thought resembled most his manner of life; but being on his knees in the metropolitan church of Palermo, before the altar of the Blessed Virgin's chapel, he prayed for light from God and the prompt succor of his most holy Mother. He then felt himself inspired to enter the order of the reformed Minor Observantins. Through motives of prudence, and for fear of being deceived, or yielding, perhaps, to human complaisance and self-satisfaction by being among the first members of that laudable reform, he resisted the first and second inspirations of his holy protectress. Finally, as he persevered in prayer for the success of an affair on which depended his eternal salvation, he felt himself inspired,

for the third time, and having no longer any doubt, he returned thanks to the Holy Spirit, the source of light, and to his divine Mother; then he arose, full of courage, and going to the convent of the reformed Minors in Palermo, he asked for the Father Guardian, and cast himself at his feet.





CHAPTER V.

HE ENTERS THE ORDER OF THE REFORMED MINOR OBSERVANTINS.

A MAN of such extraordinary virtue, whose sanctity, confirmed by prodigies, was celebrated throughout Sicily, could not but be received with as much veneration as joy, when he presented himself at the convent of St. Mary of Jesus, near Palermo, and begged to be admitted to the habit. Benedict's arrival seemed to those holy religious a striking proof of the divine protection over their new-born reform, since the Lord sent them at the same time, one of his most beloved servants, and a man long skilled in the difficult paths of retreat and penance. Hence

the religious joyfully hastened to greet Benedict, and Father Archangel of Scicli, then Guardian, embraced him. This good Superior and his community recognized the finger of God and His paternal providence, in the entrance of that hermit, already well known to inmates of the convent.

Our Saint brought with him Brother Francis of Calabria, to whom, while guardian of the hermits, he had given the habit on Mount Pellegrino. Both were admitted to the new habit, without again taking vows, because, in virtue of the authorization of the Holy See, those they had made in the hermitage, were valid and sufficient; they had, then, only to submit to their new superiors. Some days after Benedict had been invested with the habit, he was sent, without further novitiate, to the convent of St. Anne-Julienne, where he passed three years in celestial delights, because he there found

that solitude so dear to his heart. There, without hindrance, he gave himself up to the contemplation of eternal happiness, and the numberless benefits that God bestows upon men. Everything in that desert reminded him of the Divine Omnipotence; the plants, herbs, flowers, the beautiful jasper that abounded in the neighboring mountains, the precious agate which was dug up near the convent, and which has been thus called, because the first was found on the borders of the river Achates.

After three years, Benedict was recalled to the convent of St. Mary of Jesus, in Palermo, where he spent the rest of his life; for the community was very careful not to lose so good a model. Benedict there practised virtues and corporal austerities, as rigorously as he had done in his hermitage. Always full of the love of holy poverty, he put on over his tunic of palm-

leaves, which he always wore, the coarsest and most threadbare habit, made of that wool called by the Sicilians *Arbaxo*, and he never changed this garment except by his Superior's order. He went barefoot, as he had done in his desert, however severe the cold might be. He called his cell *his palace*; its furniture consisted in a coarse coverlet spread on a board, which served him for a bed, a few pictures of his patron saints, and a cross drawn on the wall with charcoal.

This extreme poverty, which Benedict loved so ardently, and kept so faithfully from his entrance into religion, being the firm support of virtues, and the best remedy for the ordinary defects of our corrupt nature, reigned sovereignly in his heart. After the example of his seraphic Father, he wished neither to possess nor appropriate the least thing, and he continually urged

his brethren, both by word and example, to the practice of this beautiful virtue. So strict was he on this point, that he feared he would fail in the perfection of religious poverty, if he made use of the condiments served in the refectory, to stimulate the appetite.

But while he so heroically practised universal detachment, the Lord showed by evident proofs, how agreeable it was to Him. St. Benedict was going one day from St. Anne-Julienne to Palermo with a brother clerk named Anthony of Coniglione. When they arrived at St. Agatha, the clerk, who was fasting and much fatigued by the length of the journey, declared that it was impossible for him to proceed further. Through love of poverty, our Saint had not brought any provisions with him, and there was no opportunity of getting any where they were. Benedict then encouraged his companion

to make a few steps more, and exhorted him to have confidence in our Heavenly Father, who feeds the very insects. He had scarcely finished speaking, when a handsome young man presented himself before them; he seemed to know the wants of the two religious, offered them a loaf of warm bread, and disappeared. The clerk, overwhelmed with astonishment, tasted the miraculous bread; a little sufficed to restore his strength, and he carried the rest to the convent at Palermo, and distributed it among the religious, who, informed of the prodigy, carefully preserved those precious fragments for a better occasion.

The same thing happened to our Saint when travelling with three religious of his order. In the midst of the journey, becoming fatigued and exhausted, they complained of having nothing to refresh themselves, but our hero of poverty unhesitatingly

assured them that Divine Providence would provide. At that moment a traveller gave them bread and wine without having been asked for it, and while the religious were refreshing themselves, he conversed with Benedict, who knew him perfectly. The three religious having eaten and drunk sufficient, returned the remainder to their benefactor; the bottle was full, and the loaf entire, as if they had never been touched! All were astonished at this, except the good negro. These prodigies increased his reputation for sanctity, as well as the respect for the poverty of the reformed Minors.

A similar occurrence took place in a journey which the Saint made from Palermo to Girgenti, with three religious, who were almost dead with hunger and fatigue. Vito Polizzi, an inhabitant of Palermo, was returning thither from Girgenti, and seeing their sad condition, he alighted from his horse,

and gave them a package of biscuits and a bottle of wine. The religious accepted a succor which came so opportunely, and they made such good use of the provision, that scarcely anything remained. They thanked the charitable cavalier, who, when he arrived at the barony of Fontaine, again alighted from his horse to partake of what had been left by the religious. To his great surprise, he found the packet full of biscuits and the bottle replenished with wine. Amazed at the sight of this miraculous multiplication, he published it everywhere, and swore to it, at the process instituted at Palermo in 1595, on the virtues and miracles of our Saint

The wonder we are about to relate, will prove, still more clearly, St. Benedict's love for poverty, and his zeal for its perfect observance. We may also see by it, how God loves the voluntary poor, whom the

incredulous affect to despise and insult. The Saint, while watching over the lowest employments of the convent, perceived that the religious clerks, in washing the dishes, as usual, after dinner, threw in the water the remnants of bread and other food, which the sobriety of the religious had made them leave in the refectory. At this sight, Benedict's zeal for poverty was inflamed; he approached the clerks and said: "My brothers, for charity's sake, do not throw away those fragments. Let us give them to the poor, for it is the blood of those who have given them to us for the love of God." Those young men would not listen to him; they even laughed at him, treating what he had said as the tiresome scrupulosity of an ignorant lay-brother. The Saint then took up one of those little brushes used for cleaning the vessels, and pressing it in his right hand, said; "Look,

children;" at the same moment, blood flowed abundantly from the brush under his pressure, and all were penetrated with terror at the sight of such a prodigy. The clerics, much confused, repented of and corrected their fault; the news of the prodigy was spread abroad, and made a profound impression on the minds of those who heard it. After the death of our hero, the Apostolic Inquisitor, coming from Spain to Sicily, caused a picture of the memorable occurrence to be painted. This may still be seen in Portugal in a chapel erected by the negroes in that kingdom, in honor of blessed Benedict, and also in other places. Several witnesses, heard at Rome during the process of his Canonization in 1715, averred that, in America, they had often seen little pictures representing this marvellous occurrence.

To his heroic love of poverty, our Saint

joined an angelic chastity, which he preserved unspotted from his cradle to his entrance into religion, and from his religious vocation until his death. For this end, he employed the most severe penances. He was too well aware of the fragility of the vessel in which is preserved our baptismal innocence, to neglect the care of such a precious treasure; he fortified his spirit by enfeebling the flesh; he preserved it from every stain by continual austerities; he watched rigorously over his senses, principally over his eyes, thinking, with reason, that it is by them that sin and corruption penetrate most surely into our souls. Hence, when he went to meet in his convent those who desired to speak to him, or when he begged in Palermo, he never fixed his eyes on persons of the other sex, not even the most modest. The Duchess Louise di Montalto, who had often held

long conferences with him, for the strength and consolation of her soul, could never boast of having seen the color of his eyes. This singular modesty, which he showed to all in general, united to a sincere charity which made him always ready to render a service, far from repelling others, or making him appear rude, won him everybody's affection and respect.

He was not less reserved in his words than in his looks. Far from allowing himself to say anything improper, he was careful to avoid the least raillery, the slightest levity. A tongue wholly consecrated to the honor of God, and the good of the neighbor, could be employed only for those two ends, and not in idle words. The servant of God was equally careful in the custody of his ears, and we shall find him speaking against the abuse of the sense of smell. When people wished, according to

the custom of the country, to kiss his hand, he would adroitly withdraw it, and humbly present his habit, to avoid the dangers of the touch. We have already seen his mortification in his food. This purity, so carefully guarded, won him singular homage from the city of Palermo, which, when taking him for its protector, gave him in its public acts, the glorious title of *Virgin*; he is named therein:—*temple of the Holy Spirit and of virginity*; yet more, he is represented in an old picture in the sacristy of his convent, with a lily in his hand, an emblem reserved to the heroes of chastity.

His obedience was so universal, that he sought the will of his Superior, even in the least things. A sign was as much to him as an express command, and was sufficient to make him leave even prayer, which was, nevertheless, his delight. It would be impossible to know the number of those

who came to him to implore favors, counsels, or consolation. His superiors decided that he should be called by three strokes of the bell; those sounds, which, to him, were the voice of obedience, were so frequent that scarcely would he have reached his cell, or gone to his employment after having dismissed a visitor at the convent door, when he would be called again; yet, without the least dissatisfaction, he would return to the door, through obedience.

This religious virtue was crowned by a singular prodigy. Don Laurence Galletti, Count of Gagliardi, fell so dangerously ill at Palermo, that the doctors were in momentary expectation of his death. The parents hastened to recommend the dying man to the prayers of the servant of God, and engaged his superiors to command him to pray for him. Benedict, ever ready to obey, went to the church, and, prostrate

before the altar of the blessed Virgin, begged her to intercede for the sick man's cure. As he prayed, he beheld the Mother of God coming forth from her niche, and, at the same time, a tomb open near the altar, while he heard Mary utter the following words: *Laurence Galletti dead and risen again.* After thanking the Mother of mercy, Benedict returned to the Guardian, and related his vision. The sick man's parents, hearing it, returned home full of joy, where they found their son perfectly cured. Every voice attributed this miracle to our saint's obedience.





CHAPTER VI.

BROTHER BENEDICT IS EMPLOYED IN THE KITCHEN OF THE
CONVENT.

THE lowest and most painful employments were always Benedict's choice. Obedience imposed on him that of cook. Certainly there could be found no one better suited to this function, or more proper for the interest of the house, since he brought to it, not only that active charity which animated all his actions, but also the power of obtaining from God the succors rendered necessary by religious poverty, and even prodigies, when occasion required. Hence we are not surprised to find him twenty-seven years in this employment, from which he was drawn at intervals, only to fill the most important places.

That kitchen was sanctified by the prayers of Benedict, and the favors of God. We read in the acts of his canonization, that one day, the holy cook made the soup out of salt pork or bacon, because the meat had not come in time; when it was brought, Benedict put it on the fire immediately. A few moments later, some religious, obliged to go to Palermo, asked Brother Benedict for some meat. The Saint replied that it had not been on the fire longer than one might be in saying the Miserere, but that they might look at it. The religious, knowing the cook's virtue, went boldly to the hearth, and, to their great astonishment, found the meat thoroughly cooked.

On one occasion, when the Provincial Chapter was being held in that convent, the number of strange religious greatly increased the labor and the amount of Lenten provisions needed, as the chapter was

held in Advent. But the snow was falling heavily, and not even the ordinary provisions could be obtained. In this extremity, Benedict, calling his companion, took with him some of the kitchen vessels, filled them with water, and retired, as if to sleep. But the Saint, full of confidence in Divine Providence, spent the whole night in prayer. Next morning, when he and his companion returned to the kitchen, they found in those vessels a quantity of fish sufficient for all the religious.

A still more admirable prodigy took place in that kitchen, once on Christmas Day. The Inquisitor of the kingdom, Don Diego de Ahedo, who was also Archbishop of Palermo, wished to be present at the Offices and Solemn Mass, celebrated in the house of the reformed Minors, and for his consolation, desired also to dine there, that he might taste the cooking of *Messire*, a sou-

briquet given to St. Benedict. Anxious, at the same time, to regale the poor community, and to be no charge to it, he sent to the kitchen a sufficient quantity of provisions, which the cook was to prepare. The day was far advanced, and High Mass had already been commenced, yet though they sought Benedict all over the convent, to urge him to hasten with the dinner, they could not find him. The Father-Vicar, Dom Ambrose de Polichi, complained of this so much the more bitterly, as he found there was not even any fire in the kitchen. The Gospel of the Mass had just been sung, when the thurifer, while moving the censer, felt a little resistance at one side; he turned and beheld Benedict kneeling behind a curtain, which hung from the tribune.

The clerk shook him, and told him that the vicar was looking for him everywhere. The saint made a sign for him to be silent,

and continued his meditation until the end of Mass. Then he arose, took a candle, and went to light the fire in the kitchen. Father Ambrose, hastening thither, found Benedict on his knees and immovable, with the light in his hand. The father scolded, and the other religious joined in his reproaches. Benedict, rising, bade them give the signal for dinner and go to the refectory, because everything was ready. The religious looked at one another; the Father Vicar asked how it could be possible; Benedict replied that the Lord would provide. At that moment, in presence of them all, and of the Inquisitor himself, who had entered, there appeared two young men, clothed in white from head to foot, who, rolling up their sleeves, began to prepare the meal. Again the Saint begged his brethren to go to the refectory, because everything was ready to be served. They

sat down to table, the dishes were served, but what were the viands? Those viands prepared by angelic hands! The religious dined, full of surprise at a prodigy of which they had been eye-witnesses. What a lesson of confidence in God! Our Lord showed clearly by this miracle, that the confidence of His servants is not the arrogance of presumption, and that they are faithfully accompanied and assisted by His angels, whom the greater number of Christians honor but slightly, or not at all.

We have, then, good reason to believe that the angels aided Benedict on many other occasions, and supplied by their aid for human weakness. This must have been the case, when they were building a new dormitory in the same convent. On that occasion, the masons, on account of the poverty of the Friars, and in virtue of a special permission, went there to work

gratuitously on holidays, asking only their dinner. Once, when they were expecting them on an approaching feast, the overseer of the work informed Father Peter of Trapani, then Guardian, that the masons could not come on that day. Consequently, no provision was made for them. But on the morning of the festival, thirty men came to work at the dormitory. When the Guardian learned the fact, it was too late to provide for them, and he went to the kitchen in the greatest anxiety. Our Saint, who was not the least troubled, seeing the Superior's uneasiness, told him to be calm and trust to Divine Providence; the Guardian shrugged his shoulders, and went away. The dinner hour being arrived, the cook repeated that the workmen might go to table, adding that *the grace of God was there in abundance for all*. The thirty masons dined, and never had they gone

away better regaled or more satisfied; they even left much food after them. In such circumstances, the liberality of heaven is always to be admired. The religious who beheld these marvels, knew, from that time, the value of Benedict's confidence in God, who aided him so efficaciously in every necessity.

But inasmuch as our Saint was anxious to provide for the nourishment of others, so much was he neglectful of his own. He persevered in his primitive abstinence; he would scarcely taste of his portion, and gave the larger share to the poor. Obligated by his employment to taste the food, he took very little, through a motive of mortification. The following instance proves how advanced he was in the practice of that virtue. Brother William having abstained from the first cherries of the season, the Saint told him that true abstinence con-

sisted, not in leaving a thing entirely, but in only tasting it, and that by this means one deprives one's self of sensible pleasure, and mortifies the appetite which has tasted it. On account of this interior light, he tasted, without difficulty, whatever was brought *as* an alms to the refectory, either in testimony of his gratitude, or for the consolation of the donors; but *out* of the refectory, his abstinence was rigorous. A gentleman of Palermo having offered him an early walnut to eat, he refused it, saying that a religious should never swerve from the common life; an excellent maxim, which he faithfully kept throughout his life.





CHAPTER VII.

ST. BENEDICT IS MADE GUARDIAN.

§ O remarkable were the virtues of Brother Benedict, that the reformed Minors, although very fervent religious, could not see among them one more proper to govern than he, although he was but a lay-brother. When Benedict found he had been elected Guardian of the convent in which he was cook, it may be imagined what a contest arose in his heart between humility and obedience. He addressed himself to the Superiors of the Observantins in the province of Sicily, and full of sadness and humility, he, like another Moses on the mountain, exaggerated his imperfections and incapacity. He was sin-

gularly eloquent in exposing before the chapter of the religious, the meanness of his birth, his condition as a lay-brother, the weakness of his mind, and, finally, his ignorance, which was so great that he knew not how either to read or write,—qualifications which he said were indispensable to a Superior. He added, that although he had, for a short time, governed the hermits of Mount Pellegrino, it was by an error, excusable on the part of lay-brothers, whose government did not require great capacity. Finally, he strongly opposed to his defects, the merits of so many religious in the monastery, more capable than he.

But his representations were useless; while he was humbling himself as much as possible, the religious recalled his virtues, his extraordinary reputation, the graces and prodigies obtained through his prayers, and above all, his well known prudence. They

knew that no one is more proper to command than he who knows how to obey, and hence they justly concluded that Benedict, being a model of obedience, would become the model of wise and prudent Superiors. They considered that, in a rising reform, in which the austerities of the Seraphical Father were followed so exactly, no one could make them more loved or better observed than he who so perfectly practised them. Consequently, they paid no attention to his pleadings.

The election being maintained, Benedict yielded through obedience; he implored the help of God, and placed himself at the head of the convent, by giving to his inferiors the rarest examples of religious virtues. He was always the first in serving the sick, in washing the feet of strange religious, at the prayers of the community, at holy ceremonies, mortifications, and pub-

lic penances. Notwithstanding his numerous occupations, no one could ever arrive before him in the church or the choir. The sacristan, however diligent he might be, always found him there. This good Superior employed himself in all the labors of the house, and in the lowest employments. He made his rest and recreation consist in helping in the kitchen, washing the dishes, drawing water, carrying wood, sweeping the house, digging in the garden, and begging in the city. The principal fruit which his subjects drew from such beautiful examples, was a continual encouragement to the exact practice of their rigorous reform, and particularly of holy humility, that virtue so dear to Benedict, and so often forgotten by Superiors; as if, in order to govern well, it were necessary to affect dignity and show contempt for inferiors.

Our excellent Guardian, humble in his demeanor, poor in his whole exterior, extenuated by penance, bore a sovereign respect towards the priests, showed himself full of charity to the lay-brothers, and employed admirable discretion in directing the novices; his patience was unalterable towards the inferiors and brothers of the house, and was affable towards everybody; hence all respected, loved, and punctually obeyed him. No one abused his humility. On the contrary, he having on one occasion corrected a novice, whom he thought guilty of a grave fault, and being afterwards assured that he was innocent, or at least less guilty than he had supposed, he knelt before him and begged his pardon;—this course, far from drawing on him any contempt, caused him to be the more admired; and everybody only esteemed the more the good Superior and master. Hence it was

that that community partook so much of the spirit of the Patriarch of Assisium. Therein was to be seen neither hatred nor coldness; the religious promptly acknowledged their failings, and mutually asked and granted pardon. That holy spot was, we may say, a mirror most clear and well-calculated to reflect the brilliancy of Benedict's virtues, and particularly of his humility, since those good religious had elected a negro lay-brother as their Superior, so far were they strangers to ambition and human respect.

Benedict's humility was revealed not only amidst mortifications, penances, and trials; it shone also amidst honors, applause, and success. The more God, who exalts the humble, wished to glorify him, the more did His servant abase himself in his abjection. The provincial chapter being held in the ancient city of Girgenti, formerly so cele-

brated, Benedict, in his quality of Guardian, was obliged to assist thereat. As soon as his arrival became known, the whole city was in a tumult of joy. Nothing was spoken of but Benedict and his sanctity, and at the news of his approach, the clergy of the cathedral, accompanied by many of the inhabitants, went to meet him. What a beautiful spectacle it was, to see the humble Benedict surrounded by the most respectable ecclesiastics, the most distinguished inhabitants, and by crowds of people, who disputed for the happiness of kissing his habit, or, at least, of touching it! The more confused and mortified the Saint became, the more he vainly sought to fly this applause, the more did they cry aloud: *Behold the Saint.* Some recommended themselves to his prayers, others wept for joy; they never grew weary of contemplating his modesty and humility amidst so

peaceful and glorious a triumph. The like happened at Bivona, where the people's joy was so excessive, and the crowd so great, that he hid himself, and fled to escape such indiscreet honors.

Pliny the Younger relates that a Spaniard, electrified by the reputation of the celebrated historian Titus Livius, made a voyage from Cadiz to Rome to behold him, and after accomplishing his purpose, returned home without trying to see anything, although Rome possessed many objects of legitimate curiosity. We read that the like thing happened to Benedict. A Portuguese came from the banks of the Tagus to see him and throw himself at his feet; then he returned, proud of having beheld the servant of God and conversed familiarly with him, so much was his reputation for sanctity spread throughout the west of Europe, and so great was the glory given him by our

Lord, even in this world! But the Most High discovered in Benedict's heart a profound contempt for perishable honors, a horror of the least sentiment of vanity, and a continual abnegation of self before God and men.

This privileged soul found his delight in prayer; in it he united himself with God, in it he applied himself to heavenly things, during all the time he could spare from his employment, and the works of piety and charity, in which he was constantly engaged. During those precious moments, the use of his senses was suspended. Two religious, on their return to the convent, hastened to his cell to ask blessing, he being Guardian, but they received no response. They repeated the *Benedicite* several times in a loud voice, but to no purpose. Finally they opened the door, and beheld Benedict on his knees in prayer.

They went up to him, making a great noise, but he heard them not. Then the religious, who really wished to receive his blessing, made so much noise that the Saint, returning to himself, and drawn from his delightful contemplation, said in a plaintive tone: *Ah! may God forgive you! God bless you!*

Although Benedict's charity for his neighbor was always remarkable, it, nevertheless, shone more brilliantly while he was Superior. Not content with being always the first to visit the sick, he also rendered them the lowest offices, watched over their health, and by holy words encouraged them to patience; when they grew worse he would spend whole nights with them. He gave orders to the porter never to send the poor away fasting; they knowing this, failed not to profit thereby. One day, several poor persons and some Spanish soldiers pre-

sented themselves at the gate. Brother Vito of Girgenti, then porter, according to his orders, distributed all the bread that he had. After these had gone, more presented themselves. Brother Vito told them he had no more bread. They were going away, very sad, when the good Guardian arrived; he called them back, and asked the porter why he had refused to give them alms. "Father Guardian," answered Brother Vito, "I have counted the portions, and there is scarcely enough for the religious." "No matter," replied the charitable Superior; "give alms to these poor people; God will provide for us." The porter obeyed; he distributed ten loaves, and when he counted what remained, found there was **more than enough** for the religious;—this was a prodigy of frequent occurrence in our Saint's time.

Prudence no less than charity is essen-

tial to good government. It causes us to adopt means most proper to a good end, and at the same time, the most conformable to the love and characters of our fellow-beings. Benedict followed this rule most exactly. He, on a certain occasion, gave a private gentle admonition to a novice, for a fault which others imprudently wished to have punished publicly; the good result proved that the Guardian had chosen the better means. He exercised the like prudence in regard of some young religious who were accustomed to talk near a large window in the dormitory, during the time of strict silence. Complaint of this being carried to the Superior, he went to that place at the time they were accustomed to break silence, and by remaining there a long time, led them to perceive their fault without his saying a word, and the disorder from that time ceased.



CHAPTER VIII.

ST. BENEDICT IS ELECTED VICAR AND MASTER OF NOVICES.

WHILE the excellent Guardian rejoiced to see the end of his triennial term of office drawing nigh, his subjects were deeply afflicted thereat. *He* desired to have more time for contemplation; and *the religious*, although running the same course, felt themselves far from the end, and knew of no one who could worthily fill the place of Father Benedict, or give so much splendor to the rising reform, as had been given by the servant of God. We have seen that when he left his hermitage to enter the convent in Palermo, he embraced the reform then in full vigor in that institute, but that new reform had great need of the help brought to it by our Saint. Although

not the father of that rigorous institute, he was certainly its foster-father, which excuses the contempt of those who date the rise of the reform in that monastery from Benedict's entrance, and call him its father.

At the end of his term, our Saint was elected Vicar, and afterwards Master of the clerks and lay-novices. We shall not retrace the picture of the virtues which he practised, since they were the same as had adorned his term of guardianship. Entering on his new employments, he was already full of vigilance, and attentive to guide those young men, whether clerks or lay-novices, in the narrow and severe path traced by the Seraphical Patriarch. It was not necessary to urge them by many words to advance courageously in penance and mortification; the example of the holy Master was sufficient, for, according to St. Chrysostom, teaching by example is the

rule of doctrine, that of the voice is the science; but the doctrine of example is virtue. Now, they saw in our Saint an inviolable fidelity to the rule, an exact obedience to the slightest wish of the new Superior, heroic patience under trial and suffering, ardent love for his neighbor, and constant readiness to render him the least service, a wise temperance which repressed every inordinate interior and exterior motion; rigorous mortification of the senses and the rebellious flesh, which he afflicted by fasts and bloody disciplines, and humbled by frequent consideration of the nothingness of self. Illumined by such a light, the young men confided to Benedict's care never wandered from the path traced out for them. If, through human frailty, some seemed to become neglectful, then the voice of the Master was heard, and no more was needed to make them return to the right

way. Benedict was aware of what Isidore of Damietta teaches, viz: that the Master does not correct his disciples by severity or chastisements, but by the ingenious address of charity, which must direct good education.

The charity of the holy Master of Novices was conformable to what St. Chrysostom, in his Twenty-seventh Homily on the Corinthians, recommends to masters, when he says: "The master's principal function is to share from the bottom of his heart in the pains and sorrows of his inferiors." This our Saint practised to the letter. The necessities of his novices were his own; he felt all their pains. In him they found not only a master, but a physician, a counsellor, a father, a superior, a friend, a sure guide, and a happy asylum, where they found peace of soul, after their combats against the passions. They came from him filled

with courage to recommence that spiritual war under the auspices of a chief accustomed to victory, who never recoiled from the combat, and who always met his enemies, the passions, with the arms of abstinence and patience, which he had inherited from the Patriarch St. Francis; hence, his disciples, accustomed to conquer in their turn, became the firm supports of the reform, which shone even beyond Sicily.

The Saint paid such particular attention to his novices, that he often read their very thoughts, and warned them when they had reason to fear bad effects. The good Master's tender solicitude was marvellously seconded by the gift of the penetration of hearts, bestowed on him by Almighty God, of which we shall speak in the following chapter. The effect of this was to keep the novices always on their guard, not only in their exterior actions, but also in their

interior. They knew, by experience, that Father Benedict clearly read the depths of their hearts, and they became assured of it by the two following facts:

While Father Louis d'Alcarno was a novice in that convent, he, on one occasion, repented of his good resolution, and resolved to return to the world. He was reflecting on it, when Father Benedict called him. The novice obeyed and listened to the Saint, who exposed vividly the misfortune of looking back, when there is no good reason for doing so, and he proved it by the strongest reasons, adding, finally: *And you, my son, why do you allow yourself to be seduced, why do you think of returning to the world?* The astonished novice replied: *And how do you know my intention?* *A little bird told me,* answered the Saint. The novice bowed his head, acknowledged the evil thought, became convinced by what he

had heard, and absolutely renounced the bad design.

Two religious, Gregory of Licata and Jerome of Palermo, while in the novitiate, formed the design of secretly leaving the convent. About seven o'clock in the evening of a day in January, they scaled the enclosure, and were already on the road, but the Saint came suddenly to the spot, reproved them gently, and led them again within the enclosure. But as they did not surmount the temptation, it, a short time afterwards, became even more violent, and they took flight a second time. They had reached the same spot when they met the Saint, who knew their secret determination. Like a good shepherd, he, with his accustomed sweetness, led the two wandering sheep back to the fold. This time they remained faithful; Benedict's exalted virtue forever banished from their minds the evil design to which they had twice yielded.



CHAPTER IX.

ST. BENEDICT'S DOCTRINE.

IT may appear surprising that we should speak of the doctrine of our Saint, after the avowal made by himself, as we have already seen, that he was ignorant, and could neither read nor write. With much greater reason will learned men, to whom science has cost so much labor, laugh at finding in their ranks, a lay-brother, drawn from the plough and his labor in the fields. But it is not the first time that, in order to confound the wise ones of the world, the sovereign Majesty of God has given knowledge to the simple, to women and children. Hence the community was not surprised to hear St. Benedict speak of

the most sublime mysteries of faith, like one perfectly skilled in the deepest and most abstruse studies. When Guardian, he often spoke in public, and his discourses were full of holy erudition and divine science. The minds and hearts of his auditors were deeply penetrated, so that his words, like the seed that fell upon good earth, produced abundant fruit.

When Vicar and Master of Novices, he was accustomed to explain to them, after Matins, the lessons of the Holy Scripture which they had recited in choir. Such explanations would have required in another long study and profound meditation; but our Saint, who could not even read the lessons, developed their hidden sense with marvellous facility. If any one proposed to him some doubt or difficulty, however subtle it might be, he would not only solve it in the most precise manner, and in the

technical terms of theology, but would also be able to give lengthy and faithful quotations from the Sacred Writings, as if he had them daily in his hands. Wise and learned men could not witness this without confusion, or without recalling with surprise the Catherines, the Fabiolas, the Marcellas and the learned Eustochium, so much commended by St. Jerome.

People were amazed to see men grown gray in study, men honored with the public esteem, often seeking, without shame, a favorable opportunity of receiving instruction from Benedict, sometimes on one difficulty, sometimes on another, and leaving him satisfied with his responses. The fruit of the holy man's instructions was not confined to giving simple lights, or to solving a few difficulties; those who consulted him, reaped from their communicatoins a still more important advantage, that of humbling

themselves in the depths of their hearts before the infinite wisdom of God, who desires, by such extraordinary favors, to confound human pride.

It would be impossible in a simple abridgment, to expose all the doubts proposed and cleared up by our Saint, or to name all those who addressed themselves to him, and went away perfectly satisfied. We shall cite only a few instances, which will be sufficient to convince the reader.

Three celebrated Franciscans, Father Joseph of Syracuse, Professor of Sacred Scripture, Father Paul of Mezzara, a distinguished religious of the province of Sicily, and Father Vincent of Messina, theologian at the Council of Trent, affirmed upon oath, that they had, on several occasions, asked Father Benedict to explain difficult passages of the Scripture, which to them seemed very obscure, and that he

had, on the instant, interpreted them with astonishing facility; they acknowledged that their science was infinitely inferior to that of the good lay-brother. This is an avowal of great weight, for, in the republic of letters, it is very rare to find one admitting the superiority of another. But in recognizing that of our Saint, they paid tribute to God Himself, who directed his words.

Father Vincent Magis, a learned Dominican of that time, having vainly endeavored to penetrate the meaning of a sentence in Scripture, laid aside his books, and went to the Convent of St. Mary of Jesus to see Benedict, to whom he was bound by ties of friendship. While he was asking for him, the servant of God entered the apartment, and even before saluting him, said: "Father, do not be uneasy at not comprehending that sentence of Scripture; I

will explain it to you with the help of God."

Father Magis was stupefied at seeing the motive of his visit discovered ere he had spoken of it, nor was he less astonished to hear Benedict solve his doubt, and give him a more perfect explanation than he could have expected to receive from a consummate theologian. At his departure, he paid a compliment to the reformed Fathers, saying: "My Fathers, you have here a great servant of God, for not only has he predicted what I came to ask him, but has explained to me the sense of a passage in Scripture, which, up till now, I could never understand."

Our Saint's doctrine was, then, accompanied by the gift of penetrating the most hidden things, and we have seen him exercising this gift in regard to fugitive novices. He had possessed it even in the hermitage.

A husbandman, who loved him and his brother hermits very much, presented him one day with a basket of fresh grapes. The Saint, while accepting them, divided them into two parts, and said to his benefactor: "I willingly accept this part for my brethren, because it comes from your own vine, but I return you the other, because you have taken it from another's vine." This was true: the ignorant man had stolen from his neighbor, in order to make his present more considerable. It was also by means of this penetration that the Saint replied to the letter of a Sister of Pope Sixtus V, without having received it, for he said to Father Ambrose of Polichi, then Guardian: "I already know what that lady desires to say; I will pray for her." The like happened to Dominic Vito, to whom he predicted his cure, and also told him what had happened between him and his

confessor; and again to Francis Ficcheto, whom the Saint reproved for not having fulfilled the paschal duty.

The happy city of Palermo also enjoyed the benefits of his supernatural science. Miss Agatha Bianchi, whose conscience was much troubled, was one of those who profited by it. She came with her mother to visit Father Benedict, who, as soon as he had seen her, exclaimed: "Temptation, temptation! Why are you surprised at it? The Mother of God was the only one who was not tempted; we must all suffer it."*

The young lady was comforted, and the mother then learned that her daughter had

* The holy Fathers distinguish two sorts of temptations: the temptations in which God sees we will yield; our Lord bids us pray to be delivered from such: *And lead us not into temptation*, and those in which we shall triumph, and which increase the merits of the saints. Certainly the Blessed Virgin having contracted no stain of sin, was exempt from the first kind of temptations. Our Saint told the exact truth.

been tormented by a temptation which she had not had the courage to discover. In the following chapter we shall relate some other revelations, because they are joined to a knowledge of the future, which the Sun of Justice was pleased to bestow upon our Saint, by reflecting on him some rays of His divine wisdom. Benedict's knowledge was not confined within the limits of religion and its dependencies; it extended also to the domain of secular prudence, and was most useful to the government. It was known throughout Sicily, that the Count d'Alba, then viceroy, went to the convent to confer with the Saint on the affairs of his administration and in difficult circumstances of state policy. The Archbishop of Palermo, as well as other bishops and prelates, consulted Benedict on the most important affairs. The most highly educated gentlemen and ladies often asked

his advice, and everywhere people testified the highest esteem for him, even in courts, where we generally find only flattery, self-interest and imposture.





CHAPTER X.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY BESTOWED ON OUR SAINT.

THE ray of heavenly light which discovered to Benedict present things unknown to men, gave him also a knowledge of the future. On one occasion, a lady named Jane had scarcely made her appearance before him, when he said: "You desire to know about your son; go in the peace of the Lord; you shall soon have tidings of him, and, before very long, will see him." All this came to pass. The Saint said to Octavius Panittera: "Follow up your law-suit; in a few days you will gain it," which really happened. When Father Benedict was Guardian, he went one day, accompanied Brother Vito, to beg at a

warehouse of Salanto. In the evening he said to his companion: "Let us pray that God will this night preserve, from the hands of the Turks, those persons in that warehouse who have been so kind to us." "But," replied the astonished Vito, "how do you know that the Turks will come precisely to-night?" Father Benedict replied: "It is enough that it will be so." Both began to pray for their benefactors. Now, about the middle of the night, two Turkish galleys and a galiot attacked the warehouse, but those who lived there, had, through a particular Providence of God, being in dread of an attack, left the depot, so that they escaped the danger, and through the Saint's prayers, the place, although entirely abandoned, was not injured.

One day, Benedict was at the door of the convent addressing words of consolation to some afflicted persons; for when unable

to do more, he testified his compassion for their misfortunes. While he was speaking, he saw a carriage coming in great haste to the convent, and he said to the assistants: "Some one has robbed that lady of a large sum of money." The carriage drove up to the convent door, but before the lady had time to speak, the Saint said: "Do not be distressed; your money is found; it is already in your house." The lady returned home with joy, and found the prophecy fully verified. Feeling that the restitution had been obtained by him who had predicted it, she, in gratitude, sent to the convent a present of wax-tapers to be burned in the church of the Reformed Minors, where they, at the same time, manifested the grace obtained by the merits of the servant of God, and the accomplishment of the prophecy.

Anthony Vignes, a Catalonian merchant,

much afflicted because a ship laden with cloth and other merchandise from Barcelona, which he was expecting, had not been heard of forty days after its departure, was led to fear it had been captured by pirates or been shipwrecked. In his anxiety, he had recourse to Father Benedict, who assured him the vessel would arrive. Vignes was reassured by this response, but after some days, his disquiet returned, and he again went to the Saint, who told him that the vessel was delayed on account of bad weather and the danger it had run, and that it had been forced to remain, for fifteen days, in the port of Sardaigne. The convent being situated on a hill, whence there was an extensive view of the sea, they perceived a vessel about twelve miles distance, sailing towards Palermo. Vignes, full of joy, thought it was his. "No," answered Benedict, "that ship is coming

from Majorca, but it will be speedily followed by yours." The result confirmed the prediction. The grateful merchant wished to make a present to the convent, without it being known beforehand, because the Saint would not accept anything for himself. At the time that the religious usually went to the refectory, Father Benedict told them to wait, saying that Vignes was bringing a fish, and he ordered the porter to wait his arrival. A few moments later, the merchant came with the fish, and finding that the porter was expecting him, was much amazed.

The wife of Don Vincent Platamone being in the pains of childbirth, was in imminent danger of death. Father Benedict, by inspiration, and without being invited, went to the palace. No sooner was he perceived, than sadness fled the house; everybody ran to him as to an angel

sent by heaven for the consolation of the family, and recommended the sick woman to his prayers. The Saint asked permission to retire to the domestic chapel to recite the Rosary, clearly foretelling to Vincent that before he should have finished his prayer, his wife would have brought forth a son who should become a good religious, but should live only a short time afterwards. A few moments later, a son was born, who, when he grew up, became doctor of laws. Turning his talents in another direction, he entered the Society of Jesus, where he was employed in preaching, and finally, at the entreaties of the Fathers of Syracuse, he was sent to Palermo. The pestilence breaking out at that time, the good religious was attacked by it while generously assisting the sick in the public hospital, and died there, regretted by everybody, but especially by his father. In the examination insti-

tuted in Palermo, in 1625, that good knight deposed, that he had bitterly mourned his son's death, but had been consoled in seeing blessed Benedict's prophecy so fully accomplished.

According to an evil report spread in Palermo, a felucca from Girgenti had been pursued by several Turkish brigantines, and it was justly feared that it had been captured. Madame Ginepra Luparini, who knew that her son, Father Thomas, a Capuchin, was in the felucca, hastened, all in tears, to Father Benedict. The Saint told her, smiling, that Father Thomas had arrived safe in Rome, and that, either on that day or the next, she would receive his letters. The lady, fully reassured, returned home, where she found that a young man from Rome had brought a letter from Father Thomas, but that having been told to give it only into his mother's hands, he

had been unwilling to leave it, but had promised to return on the morrow. Thus was the prediction exactly accomplished in every circumstance.

Don Peter Barreri had set out for Genoa with the intention of marrying a relation of the Doge, being determined by the hope of a rich dowry. His parents were extremely afflicted thereat, as it was an alliance unsuitable to their condition, against which they had often spoken very strongly, but they had no longer any hope of avoiding it, as the young knight had set out. The mother, in default of any other consolation, went to the convent, and revealed to Benedict the cause of her grief, adding that she could see no remedy. But the Saint, having a clear knowledge of the future, said to her: "Be consoled; is there no sickness in the world?" The prophecy was not understood at that time, but, after

some days, they learned that Don Peter had been dangerously ill in Rome, that his disobedience had inspired him with a just fear, and that, upon his recovery, he had resolved to return home. In fact, he returned to Palermo, and thus fulfilled the words of Benedict, who had not only predicted his illness, but that it would result in his changing his design and returning to Palermo to take care of his parents. Everybody believed that both the prediction and its accomplishment were due to the prayers of our Saint.

But let us listen to an account given by the Lady Petronilla Alesi at the juridicial examinations. She was then sixty years old. "I was first married," said she, "to Cæsar Russo, with whom I lived several years. I was much disquieted and troubled about his irregular habits. Not knowing what to do, I told my anxiety to everybody, in

hopes of finding a remedy. I had recourse to a magician, who gave me a certain kind of powder in a paper, telling me to give it to him to drink, or, at least, to throw it down his back. I retired with the intention of obeying him, but remorse took possession of me, and returning to myself, I resolved not to do it. A better thought entered my mind. I learned that, in the convent of St. Mary of Jesus, there dwelt a holy religious called Benedict of Sanfratello, who wrought many miracles. I resolved to seek from him some consolation in my grief, and especially a remedy for my disquiet of mind. I went to him, and exposed my husband's state. 'Go,' said he, 'go and throw away the demon you have with you, and then return.' Failing to understand him, I told the Saint I did not know what he wished me to do, but he repeated the words more forcibly, and left

me. As I was reflecting on the meaning of what I had just heard, my mother, who was present, but who is now dead, reminded me of the magician's powder, and asked me if I had it about me. Remembering that it was in my pocket, I threw it away, and even shook out my pocket, that no vestige of it might remain. Then I recalled Father Benedict, who came to me smiling, and, before I had spoken, said: 'Now that you have thrown away the demon that you had with you, go home in peace; your husband expects you, and henceforth you will live peaceably with him.' Encouraged by this good news, I returned home, where my husband was really awaiting me, and from that moment we lived happily together. He became wholly changed, and seemed like another man, which lasted until his death; and I have never forgotten the perfect accomplishment of Father Benedict's prediction."

Our Saint's prophecies were so numerous, that, in order not to interrupt the thread of this history, we shall content ourselves with briefly noticing a few of them. He told two mothers who were deeply afflicted at their sons' disorders, that they should soon perish, which really came to pass. Augustin Benaccolto recommended the prayer of Father Benedict for his son, who was ill in Spain; the Saint predicted his recovery and the speedy arrival of the good news, five days previous to their receiving intelligence of the fact. He assured the family of Nicholas Precori that he had died out of the kingdom. He affirmed to Lucretia Navaretti that her husband was painting the royal palace at Madrid, and that he would soon return to his own country, which was verified by the event. He announced the death of Bianca, sister of the Princess of Calatanis-

seta, and also that of Madame Diana of Arragon and the cure of her husband, which was fully verified.

Hence, so certain were they in Palermo of St. Benedict's prophecies, that when any one went to consult him on some important affair, particularly the cure or death of the sick, he was very careful to notice the Saint's manner of answering. If he said not to fear, or bade him to hope or to pray to God, or something of that kind, the sick person would certainly recover. But if he bade him submit to God, or resign himself to the Divine will, no one doubted that the person recommended would die. Vignes, of whom we have spoken at the beginning of this chapter, deposed under oath, in the examination instituted at Palermo, that Francis Almanara, a Catalonian, having fallen sick at his house, he sent word to Benedict to pray for the patient, telling the mes-

senger to pay particular attention to the Saint's words. The answer was, "Tell Don Antonio to be patient and resign himself to our Lord's will." When Vignes heard this, he knew that his friend would die, which really happened in a few days. The Saint made many other prophecies, which were literally verified; we shall speak of more, when we come to his death. Let the reader here share our pity for those who take such trouble to learn the most trifling things, future and present, and who, after so many efforts to discover the truth, find it elude their search, while the true servants of God know every thing by casting a glance on the heavenly books.



CHAPTER XI.

ST. BENEDICT RETURNS TO THE KITCHEN.

AFTER having perfectly filled, both by word and example, the offices of Vicar and Master of Novices, charges which, moreover, he had exercised only through obedience and not through ambition, bribery, or desire of domination, Benedict joyfully returned to his employment in the kitchen, and gave himself entirely to it. That office was agreeable to his humility; it also gave him more opportunities for prayer and extraordinary penitential exercises. He believed he could live more hidden there, and in truth, we know not the heavenly gifts and favors he received in that humble retreat. Being no longer

obliged to attend to the house, or occupy himself with the care of the young subjects, he could be more easily recollected and united with God. While the fire prepared the food, or the angels accomplished his humble duties, he persevered in prayer, and therein received those real and solid advantages, of which no idea can be formed by the wise ones of the age, who dwell in darkness in the midst of light

At the door of that humble kitchen were to be seen the nobles of Palermo, who sought to honor the Saint and recommend themselves to his prayers, the learned who came for advice, the afflicted who desired consolation, the sick who hoped for the recovery of their health, and the indigent who desired assistance. A lady, whose eyes were so badly diseased that she had almost lost her sight, went to the convent, and asked to speak with Saint Benedict. He was just

then occupied in salting a fish, but as soon as called he went, without thinking to wash his hands. The noble lady showed him her infirmity, and begged him to cure her; he made the sign of the cross on her eyes with his hands covered with salt; the disease immediately disappeared, and she perfectly recovered her sight. What were her surprise and joy? what the sentiments of those who had witnessed the prodigy? They may be more easily imagined than described.

People extolled the sanctity of the holy religious, recalling all the graces which the Most High had deigned to shed on the faithful through his intercession. The fame of his heroic virtues was not confined to the city of Palermo no more than that of his gifts and miracles; it was spread far and wide. What effect had this on our Saint? He humbled himself profoundly

before God, and, prostrate on the earth, confessed before the Divine Majesty and before all men, that he was the vilest and most miserable of sinners; and this he repeated whenever any one asked his prayers. This sincere humility made him seek the most solitary places in the convent. When he went abroad, he chose the most unfrequented roads; if obliged to go to Palermo, he would wrap himself in his cloak, and cover his head with the capouche, that he might not be known. He often asked the religious to recommend him to God in their general and private prayers, that he might acquire the virtue of humility. He used to say to them, "I am a miserable sinner, and full of pride; pray God to make me humble." Amidst the universal esteem and veneration with which he was surrounded, and while his praises were in every one's mouth, he abased him-

self before God, and, prostrate on the earth, he cried out, "O Lord! can it be that such honor is paid to me, who am only a worm of the earth, who am but dust and corruption!"

But those honors were precisely a favor from heaven. Our Saint being one day at the convent gate, occupied in consoling the afflicted,—for he was accustomed to make the nourishment of the soul succeed that of the body,—a blind man, led by a dog, came up and asked an alms. Benedict, touched by compassion and a secret inspiration, made the sign of the cross on the eyes of the blind man, who cried aloud: *I see! A miracle! a miracle!* Drawn by his cries of joy, the religious ran to the spot, and a crowd gathered around him to assure themselves that he was cured. Then the humble Benedict withdrew, and hid himself in a thicket, where he remained for some time.

On his return to the kitchen, he was asked why he had fled away after the blind man's cure. He answered that the Blessed Virgin had wrought that prodigy, and that he had concealed himself, lest it might be inconsiderately attributed to him, who was only a poor, miserable sinner. He, in truth, believed himself to be such, and it was that conviction which caused him to perform such severe penances, to take such bloody disciplines, to fast so rigorously, to give so much time to prayer, and to prostrate himself both day and night before his Creator, to beg pardon for his offences. God took delight in honoring His servant's profound humility, by giving him striking proofs of His love. During prayer, Benedict's face often became luminous with heavenly light. It is known that St. Francis of Assisium also possessed this gift. On one occasion, at Assisium, while he was speaking to the

religious, in the refectory, of heavenly things, his whole figure became so luminous that the light shone all over the house, so that people ran there, thinking it was on fire. Father Michael of Girgenti was invited by another religious to go to the choir, and see St. Benedict in the like state, while he was praying during the night. The rays of light darting from his countenance illumined the whole choir, although there was no other light there at the time. Father Jerome of Drepano, at the invitation of his brethren, enjoyed the same spectacle, and admired the like prodigy; he afterwards affirmed that everybody regarded that light as extraordinary. St. Benedict's face became more radiant at the time of Holy Communion. He approached that ineffable Sacrament with inexpressible devotion and tenderness. The Reformed religious were, according to custom, to assist at

the Corpus Christi procession at Palermo. Father Severinus de la Ficarra, then Superior, ordered Father Benedict to carry the cross. The Saint immediately obeyed, and walked, during the whole procession, with his eyes fixed on the crucifix; he was as if ravished out of himself; his face beamed with supernatural light; people remarked it to one another, and everybody was much moved. The Saint's gaze was fixed on the crucifix, and his heart attached to the Divine Sacrament. But the light of the august Sacrament, invisible to the eyes of men, was reflected on Benedict's face, who, in that moment, was wholly absorbed in the consideration of the adorable Mystery, in which God Himself becomes our nourishment. That contemplation was a continual ecstasy, which lasted the whole time of the procession. In order to distinguish between the diabolical ecstasies of the Montanists

and the divine ecstasies of the true prophets of the New Testament, the first are called *parestases*, that is to say, furious and fanatical transports of the soul, and the second simply *ecstasies*. Tertullian, after he had become an heretical Montanist, went so far as to call ecstasy *folly*. We say that ecstasy is, properly speaking, an extraordinary movement of the soul, which has but short duration. It is sometimes confounded with *enthusiasm*, which inflames and transports the soul animated by the spirit of God, so that it expresses singular and supernatural things; it was this enthusiasm with which the ancient prophets and many other holy souls were seized. Hence it comes that the gift of prophecy is often united with ecstasy, and sacred history frequently shows them united in the early ages of the Church. But the ecstasies with which the saints, and among them our Benedict, were favored,

were distinct from the prophecies, being in him only a ravishing of spirit, in the great fervor of prayer, by which he was raised to the vision of heavenly things; and that elevation of spirit was sometimes so vehement that it drew the body itself, which might be seen elevated from the ground more or less, and following the soul tending to its centre, which is God.

We have already spoken of the ecstasies and visions which he frequently had, in which the body did not follow the spirit by rising in the air, when he prayed in his cell, in the convent garden, or in the kitchen on Christmas day, and particularly in the procession of which we have just spoken. We have no other monument of the ecstasies in which our Saint's body was raised from the ground, than the attestation, under oath, of the servant of God, Sister Francis Locitraro, who beheld Father Benedict

raised in the air before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, as she declared to her spiritual father, and afterwards in the juridical examination. The facility with which the Saint could hide himself in the woods contiguous to the convent, and the profound silence of the night, the faithful witness of his prayers and vigils, prevented others from seeing him thus raised in the air, which must, nevertheless, have frequently happened, according to the opinion of many. Father Dominic Gravina, in the twenty-second chapter of the second book of *The Voice of the Turtle Dove*, speaks as follows: "Father Benedict of Sanfratello was adorned with purity, simplicity, and the spirit of prophecy, and favored with the gift of ecstasy." Let us then be content with seeing him elevated in spirit, according to the words of Pope St. Gregory in the Third Homily of the first book on the

Prophet Ezechiel: "We are in some sort elevated in the air by contemplation, which raises us above ourselves."

The Saint acquitted himself so well, and so much to the satisfaction of his superiors, of his employment as cook, that they willingly allowed him to retain it for the rest of his life. In truth, it would have been difficult for them to find a cook so charitable, so useful, and so suitable to their wants. They knew, by experience, how favored he was by Heaven; they were daily indebted to him for celestial favors and human succors, in virtue of which, that community, then in all the rigor of the reform, was sustained by the help of the extraordinary favors procured by Benedict, so that the convent could flatter itself with having everything while it had its holy cook.

The religious had an opportunity of

recognizing the particular succors granted by Heaven to our Saint, when, on one occasion, there was no wood for the kitchen. St. Benedict, going out, perceived that a tree had been thrown down by a storm; it was so large that six robust men could scarcely have moved it, much less carried it away. The holy cook, no way embarrassed, lifted it on those shoulders which he so severely scourged, with as much ease as if it had been a cane or a little branch. Astonished at the sight, the religious asked him how he could bear such an enormous weight. The Saint merely replied that he had brought it for the use of the kitchen, as there was no wood; but everybody was convinced that an invisible hand had assisted him in bearing the burden.



CHAPTER XII.

MIRACLES WROUGHT BY THE SAINT DURING HIS LIFE.

BESIDES the miracles we have already recorded, the authentic memoirs we have in our possession give many others, but as neither time nor place are designated, we have chosen only a few, the recital of which will suffice to prove our Lord's predilection for His servant Benedict. We shall first relate what happened to a carpenter of Palermo, named Libert de Nicholas, originally from Genoa. While he was engaged, with some other workmen, in the convent, he perceived some fir-cones hanging on a very high tree. Anxious to have them, he climbed up some branches which served as a ladder, but when he had

reached a great height, while trying to grasp at another branch, that on which he stood failed him, and he fell to the ground, striking against a stone at the foot of the tree, where he lay without breath or motion. The religious, pale and trembling, ran to the wounded man, who lay unconscious and apparently dead. Father Benedict reanimated their faith, passed his hands over the head and limbs of the carpenter, who rose up, feeling no pain, and returned to work.

A poor cripple coming to the convent, cast himself at Benedict's feet, and with tears, begged his cure; the Saint made the sign of the cross upon the afflicted members; the man immediately cast away his crutches, and ran through the cloister, crying out, *A miracle! A miracle!* By the sign of the cross, Benedict also restored sight to several blind persons, among whom

we may mention M. Vincent, and the daughter of Francis Pagliesi, who had both been deprived of their sight by cataract. The daughter of Laurence Catania, and a religious of an abbey in Palermo, who had become blind by an accident, recovered their sight by the Saint's prayers.

Francis Mary Masciulla of Palermo, had been vainly seeking, for two years, a remedy for a strange disease which afflicted his daughter, who was not ten years old. She grew worse from day to day, and seemed only skin and bone, but the physicians understood nothing about her case. After having tried every remedy, the father thought of having recourse to Benedict, and, that he might obtain his request, made the convent a present of thirty pounds of oil, which was the weight of the sick child. Going to the convent with his wife and child, he asked for Father Benedict, and

recommended their daughter to his prayers. The Saint placed his hand on the little girl's head, recited some prayers, and taking some oil from the lamp of the Blessed Virgin, he told the mother to anoint her with it. From that moment she began to recover, and was soon perfectly cured.

Two sons of a teacher in Palermo began to quarrel in a garden near Benedict's convent; they went so far, that the stronger of the two threw his brother on the ground, and struck him on the breast with a heavy stone, so violently, that he vomited a great quantity of blood, and lay without any signs of life or respiration. The father and other relations knew not what to do, but Benedict coming at that moment, no one knew how, he raised their courage, and inspired them with hope. Casting themselves at his feet, they begged him to cure the wounded boy. The Saint, as was his cus-

tom, exhorted them to have a lively confidence in God; then, going up to the young man, he made the sign of the cross with saliva on the injured and bloody parts, and went away. But scarcely had he turned his back, when the boy began to breathe, and rose to his feet; his parents wished him to rest, but he refused, and returned to the garden to walk and amuse himself, feeling not the slightest trace of his wound.

Vincent and Philip Vassalli came to the convent to ask an orange for their nephew, who was sick. The sacristan to whom they addressed themselves, told them politely that it was impossible to oblige them, as the winter had stripped the orange trees of their fruit and even their leaves; to remove all their doubts he took them to the orangery, and examined the trees, to see if any might be on the branches, but the search was fruitless. A man named

Andrew Bertucci of Palermo, who was known to Benedict, assisted them in the search. When they had convinced themselves that there was not an orange there, the Saint entered, and they told him of their disappointment, but he bade Andrew look more closely. Bertucci promptly obeyed, but with the same result. "What!" said Father Benedict, "are not those oranges that are hanging over your head?" Andrew raised his eyes, and beheld, just above him, a branch laden with five beautiful oranges. Everybody was convinced that they were miraculous, as they were in such a conspicuous place, and they afterwards contributed to the cure of the sick boy.

Here again we are compelled to abridge, by recording only a few of our Saint's miracles, or by confining ourselves to merely mentioning the names of some of the per-

sons favored. Frances Fidalia had seven ulcers in her breast; our Saint cured her instantly by the sign of the cross; he, in the same manner, cured the Marchioness Julianna of a mortal inflammation of the chest. By the same sign, with the invocation of Jesus, Mary, and Francis, he healed Euphrosyne Ferreri of the scrofula, also Mme. Laura Montaperto, sister of the Baron of Reufadali, a son of John James Cantarin, and Roch Imbarbera. In the like manner, he cured the daughter of Vincent Lucidi, whose arm was contracted by an imposthume, and a man recovered the use of his arm by Benedict's simply touching it. By a short prayer, he cured a lady afflicted with the dropsy. Some hairs of his beard, taken secretly when the Saint was shaving, being applied by Anthony Luparelli of Girgenti to a mortal wound which Georland his son had received in the

region of the heart, the young man was healed on the instant. One visit which our Saint, by his Superior's order, paid to the wife of the Viceroy of Sicily, sufficed to restore her health.

Laurence Bonaparte being reduced to extremity, and given over by his physicians, had recourse to the prayers of our Saint, and was immediately cured. The Saint, by the sign of the cross, restored sight to two little girls, Pierrette Bianca and Lucretia Catania, cured a little boy of hernia, and restored health to Frances Matassa. But among the cures he wrought during his life, the following is most remarkable. The son of George Russo, who had been killed, was brought to the church to be buried. Father Benedict, moved with compassion, offered a short prayer; then going to the dead child, he made the sign of the cross over him, and recalled him to life;

restoring him to those who had brought him to the tomb, he changed their tears of grief into tears of joy, and to their first emotions of surprise succeeded general applause.

The prodigies wrought by Benedict extended even to the animals, fields, and gardens. The mule belonging to the convent-physician being lame, on account of a broken foot having been badly set, the Saint said the Lord's Prayer, and the animal was cured. At his prayers, destructive insects fled from the fields they had infected; he had but to raise his hand, and ravaging worms fell dead, and the pious gardeners beheld with surprise the plants that had been destroyed, restored again, the leaves renewed, and the fruits multiplied. It was, in truth, eminently proper, that he who, in his youth, had watered the earth with his sweat, and opened it with

the plough, should be able to preserve and augment its fruits by the power received from its Creator. Hence, the wisest cultivators called on Benedict, as on another Isidore, to repair the losses of bad seasons and adverse winds, by extending his hand over the fields.

We shall conclude this chapter by the reflection of a learned historian, in recalling the miracles of St. Benedict. "Our blessed Saint received from God the power of healing the sick, especially those afflicted with hernia, sciatica, *catarrh*, and headache. Throughout his life, sick persons came daily to the convent, and they rarely failed to obtain through the Saint the desired cure." After this useful reflection, let us resume the thread of our history; the prudent reader will not need our counsels; he has been too well taught by experience the uncertainty, and, frequently, the inutility of

human remedies. Our Saint's altar will appear to them, then, a most certain refuge in their diseases, or in those of their fellow-beings.





CHAPTER XIII.

ST. BENEDICT'S ILLNESS AND DEATH.

AFTER having spent twenty-seven years in the kitchen of the convent, (which he had never wholly abandoned, not even when he held the office of Guardian or of Master of Novices and Vicar, because he could there more continually mortify his body, and find the delights of the soul;) after he had so long mingled his sweat with the blood of his macerations; after so many prodigies wrought in that kitchen, in favor of his neighbor, and to the glory of God, our Saint fell ill in January, 1589. From the very hour of his birth, he had prepared

himself for his blessed death. The news of his illness was sent immediately to John Dominic Rubiani, a rich lawyer of Palermo, who had always venerated Benedict as a saint. He was not slow in visiting him, and as he seemed deeply afflicted, thinking that sickness the sign of his approaching death, the servant of God said to him: "This time it is our Lord's will that I recover from the malady, but the next time I shall die; this will be before long, because I have finished my career." This really happened. Benedict recovered, but only for a short time. On the 4th of the following March he was attacked by a continual and violent fever.

The literal accomplishment of the first part of his prediction caused the second to be considered infallibly certain. The community was plunged in grief at seeing itself about to lose a member so holy, so venera-

ble, so useful. Nor was this sadness confined within the limits of the cloister; the poor, the sick, those friends, those noblemen, those learned men who had sought from him succor, health, advice, or who loved to visit him through devotion or in the hope of profiting by his knowledge, all were overwhelmed with sorrow on learning his sickness and his prediction. And although the mortal malady slowly wore away the thread of his beautiful life, and the Saint calmly suffered during a whole month, yet no ray of hope ever softened the universal regret, because Benedict's prophecies had never failed to be accomplished.

It is impossible to describe the assiduous and tender care bestowed on him by the sorrow-stricken religious, who surrounded his bed. Gratitude, fraternal charity, and their own spiritual interest led them to this service, which they never interrupted.

From Benedict's life, they judged clearly what would be his death, and the recompense of his heroic actions; and each hoped to have him for his protector in heaven. Hence, everybody recommended himself to him, and this was their only consolation. The Saint, filled with celestial joy, thanked them affectionately, and begged them not to fatigue themselves, as all their attentions would be useless. Nevertheless, although he accepted their care with gratitude, the holy desire of suffering which had possessed him during life, grew more vehement in his last moments, and caused the attentions of his brethren to be more a pain than a consolation to him. When they gave him a drink to calm the burning thirst produced by fever, he used to say: "Why show so much delicacy for the body? What good are so many remedies? The Saviour of the world, my Love, endured so many tor-

ments in His cruel passion! why is so much attention paid to me?"

The Saint's fervor, and his ardent wish to suffer, so as to be more conformable to his Master in his death, increased in proportion as his last moments approached. He gave a striking proof of this when, being asked if he suffered from thirst, he, not to fail in the truth, replied that he had thirst, and even a burning thirst, but that it seemed as nothing when he thought of our Redeemer's thirst on the cross; hence he endured it with admirable joy and patience. And as Jesus on Calvary did not refuse the drink offered Him, so Benedict, faithful to the last to obedience, took whatever was presented by the physicians and infirmarians. Hence, on the very day of his death, he took, at the physician's order, the yolks of two eggs, which to him, as well as to others, must have seemed

very heavy, and unsuitable to his complaint.

During the course of his last illness, St. Benedict had several times received the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, but in his last moments, before he received the Holy Viaticum, he raised himself a little in his poor bed, and having put his cord around his neck, he, with all his strength, begged the pardon of his faults, and he did it with so much submission and so many tears, that he deeply moved all the assistants. Knowing well his innocence and sanctity, they admired him while he confessed that he was the most miserable sinner on earth. It is not difficult to imagine the sweet transports of that pure soul in receiving the Holy Viaticum, and his recollection when Extreme Unction was administered to him.

But suddenly, in the midst of his repose,

he said to his infirmarians, Father Francis of Genoa, and Fathers Paul and William of Piazza: "Place some chairs for those holy ladies who come to visit me;" and as the religious replied that they saw none, he said: "What! do you not see St. Ursula, who has brought her holy company to visit me? There are so many that they would fill a large monastery." While he spoke, his face became so radiant that it illuminated the whole cell. St. Benedict was very devout to those holy virgins; it was not, then, surprising that God permitted them to bear him to the glory of heaven. Some moments later the sick man added: *Show courtesy to Father Anthony of Callagirone.* This religious had died several years previous in the odor of sanctity. The Saint added: *Do you not see him here present?* Father William, to whom the Saint had thus spoken, seeing the moment

of his precious death drawing nigh, was about to light the blessed candles, but Benedict said: "No, my son; the hour is not yet come; when it arrives, I will tell you." Then he again recollected himself; his face became resplendent, and in a few moments, he made a sign for the candles to be lit. Then crossing his hands on his breast, and interrupting the recommendation of the soul, he, with perfect presence of mind, said fervently: *Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit*, and calmly gave up his soul, he being sixty-five years old. No one remarked any movement or change in his body, and they scarcely perceived that he had expired. His death took place on the 4th of April, 1589, about eleven o'clock in the morning.

Benedicta Nastasi, his niece, a very virtuous young person, being at home weeping over the approaching death of her dear

uncle, thought she beheld a dove rising in the air; at the same moment she heard the words: "You do not ask me anything, Benedicta?" Remembering her blessed uncle, she asked him whither he was going? *To heaven*, was the reply. Benedicta immediately reported what had happened to Rubiani; he went to the convent, and ascertained that the vision had occurred precisely at the moment of Benedict's death.

The Viceroy was informed of the death, as he had desired, and on the following day he went to the convent. They could not refuse to open the tomb of the servant of God, but when they entered the cave with a torch to show him the body, the light was extinguished. As this happened three times, they piously concluded that it was the good pleasure of God to reserve another kind of glory for that venerated body; we may also

reflect that the humility of that tomb was incompatible with the splendor of a throne. Mgr. Louis Torres, Archbishop of Montreal, and Mgr. Baraona, Inquisitor of the kingdom of Naples, followed by a crowd of most distinguished persons, visited the tomb, to implore the intercession of the servant of God, and each spoke of some of his brilliant actions, and especially of the graces bestowed by the hand of the Almighty, through St. Benedict's prayers, on the happy Sicilians. But what shall we say of the concourse of people?

The news of Benedict's death being spread abroad, the inhabitants of Palermo flocked in crowds to the church of St. Mary of Jesus. Persons of every, age, sex, and condition were attracted by the delightful odor which came from the virginal body. He was universally regretted, and the people wept at not being able to behold the gen-

eral benefactor; they reproached the religious with having so soon withdrawn the holy remains from public veneration. The whole city of Palermo reproached itself for having been ignorant of the day of Benedict's death, although the occasion of it was pious and laudable;—it being the custom of the inhabitants to visit, on that day, the Church of the Holy Ghost, a circumstance predicted by Benedict.

To soothe the pious regrets of the people, and, at the same time, satisfy their devotion, the friars cut into a thousand pieces the garments of the saint, but what were they among so vast a concourse of residents and strangers, who pressed to the venerated tomb? Such was their importunity that they asked for and obtained the distribution of small pieces of the habits of those, at least, who had served St. Benedict in his last illness, and they hoped to receive

through them grace and consolation, as we read was the effect of the shadow of the Prince of the Apostles. From all parts of Sicily, people came to visit the holy tomb; as for the inhabitants of Sanfratello, they continually flocked to it, during upwards of four months.





CHAPTER XIV.

MIRACLES OPERATED AFTER HIS DEATH.

THE inhabitants of Sicily doubted not that the Most High, after having so brilliantly displayed His power by the works of the Saint during life, would be pleased to give more glorious evidence of his sanctity after He had placed him among the blessed, and they, very justly, hoped that the Saint, whose prayers and compassion had been so useful to the afflicted, would, now in heaven, obtain graces and prodigies for those who should invoke him. We would present to our readers a longer series of miracles operated by our Saint after death, were it not for the limits we

have prescribed ourselves in this history, and for the distance also which separates us from those nations imbued with devotion to Benedict, in whose midst those wonders were operated. Hence, from the voluminous collection of the process, we choose only a few, which will suffice to excite the readers to confidence when oppressed by those evils that afflict human nature. This, in truth, is one of the motives which cause the lives of the heroes of Christianity to be written.

Matthew Baldi, an inhabitant of Sanfratello, had been subject, for five years, to a singular malady; which the Romans and Sicilians called *lupomania*. This is a frightful madness, which, in its paroxysms, deprives the patient of the use of reason, particularly during the month of February. Then, like a madman, he leaves his house at night, and with an air of ferocity, roams

around cemeteries and tombs; this has been testified on oath by many witnesses, though some will not believe it. The unfortunate Matthew Baldi ran at night along the high roads, howling like a famished wolf, tearing himself in a cruel manner, and terrifying those who heard him even at a distance. His parents, who, from certain signs, could judge of the approach of the paroxysm, tried several times, but in vain, to bind him with strong ropes. The violence of the fit burst the strongest bonds, and the patient worked in spasms for several hours, after which he was so weak and exhausted as to be unable, for several days, to do anything at all. He had been, as we have already said, in that condition for five years, when some one brought from Sanfratello a relic of St. Benedict, for the consolation of his country. Amidst the general concourse, came Baldi with his

mother and wife, and with many tears they prayed at the foot of the altar for his cure. St. Benedict, propitious to their vows, presented them at the throne of the Almighty, and the man was radically healed, as he himself affirmed in the juridical information, nine years after his cure.

Melchior Biondo, a goldsmith of Palermo, had been afflicted with a tedious malignant fever, from which time he suffered extreme pain in the lower members of his body, particularly his legs and feet, so that he could neither walk about nor remain at ease. For four months he vainly tried all human remedies. Then he had recourse to Heaven, and fervently invoked St. Francis. One night as he lay awake, (for he had long been deprived of sleep,) he seemed to himself to be on his bed in the church of St. Mary of Jesus, near the sacristy, standing in the door of which was a religious, whom

he easily recognized as Father Benedict, to whom, when alive, he had spoken several times. Rejoiced at the sight, the sick man tried to rise, but finding himself unable to do so, he cried: "O, Father Benedict, pray to God and St. Francis that I may receive my health." The Saint replied: "My son, be content. Our Lord will grant you that grace." At these words, Melchior fell asleep, and **when** he awoke, four hours afterwards, he **again** had the same vision. Repeating his petition, he met the same response, but he added: "And what token do you give me, Father, that God has granted me this grace?" St. Benedict immediately blessed him three times and disappeared, when the **sick** man found he was cured, and arose in perfect health, to the astonishment and joy of his friends.

In 1624, Palermo was ravaged by pestilence. Dominic Grimaldi, a boy of four-

teen, was attacked by it. A violent headache, fever, vomiting, and, above all, a tumor in the thigh, were his symptoms at the end of three days. Sister Paula Nastasi, niece of St. Benedict, and aunt of the patient, having no confidence in human remedies, laid a picture of the Saint on the boy, and fervently recommended him to her blessed uncle. Scarcely had the picture touched him ere the symptoms were abated; he fell asleep, and when he awoke, no trace of the distemper remained.

Anthony Forti, son of a resident of Palermo, had a tumor in his right thigh, which caused him the greatest agony. The art of the first surgeon having failed, a consultation was called, in which it was decided, that on account of the malignity and depth of the tumor, fire and the knife were the only remedies, and the surgeons agreed to perform the operation on the following day.

The child's mother, terrified at the thought of such a painful remedy, procured that evening a piece of blessed Benedict's habit, which she placed on the tumor. The boy fell asleep, and on awaking, felt neither pain nor inflammation; he arose and went to work. When the surgeon came, at the appointed hour, to perform the operation, and found the patient in perfect health, he shared in the general astonishment, and acknowledged the prodigy.

Sister Catherine Torongi, a professed religious of the monastery of St. Mary of Mt. Olivet, in Palermo, suffered violent pain for several months, and all the remedies she tried failed to bring her any relief. She had recourse to the power from on high, and knowing that our Lord had operated many miracles through the intercession of St. Benedict, she invoked him, and made a vow to daily recite five *Paters*

and *Aves* in his honor, if she were delivered from her suffering. Scarcely had she pronounced her vow, when she passed a stone of considerable size, and her pain ceased. This state of health lasted seven months, and as the account of Benedict's miracles and virtues was being then taken in Palermo, some one advised her to render juridical testimony of the favor she had received, and thus contribute to the glory of God and blessed Benedict. She replied, with an air of indifference, that he had performed many miracles, and that the relation of that which concerned her was unnecessary. At that very moment, she was attacked by her former pain, which seemed more violent than ever. Recognizing her ingratitude, she renewed her vow, adding thereto that she would annually offer four wax tapers at the Saint's tomb, on the day of his decease, and she promised to publish

the miracle, all which she faithfully accomplished. The pain again ceased and returned no more, as is proved by the testimony of the same religious, who, twelve years later, confirmed her first account by testifying to the permanency of her cure.

Augustin Foresta, silk manufacturer in Palermo, having broken a leg, had employed the best surgeons for his cure, but at the end of forty-five days, he was so lame as to be obliged to use crutches. Thus he remained from May until November, when, despairing of his cure, he caused himself to be taken to our Saint's tomb, where he, with no less fervor than confidence, implored his cure. His prayer was immediately answered; he rose up perfectly well, and returned home full of joy, and without any crutch, publishing, as he went, the favor he had received less by his words than by tears of gratitude. In

memory of the prodigy, he sent to the Saint's tomb, a leg made of silver, and valued at ten piastres.

Madame Catherine Valesia was going in her carriage to the church of St. Mary of Jesus, accompanied by her son, five years of age; the child fell, and the wheel, passing over him, broke his thigh. The mother, deeply afflicted, yet at the same time full of courage and confidence, continued her route. On arriving at the church, she perceived that the case that contained St. Benedict's body was being opened, to satisfy the devotion of some strangers. She gave her child to two religious, that they might touch the Saint's body with the affected member. No sooner was this done than the child, ceasing his cries and groans, began to walk, and even to jump with joy, as if to testify his share in his mother's gratitude.

Those who read the lives of the heroes of our holy religion, love to find therein the recital of those marvels which surpass the laws of nature, and are operated by their merits. Many such are to be found in the acts of our Saint, but we shall merely run over a few, lest we exceed our prescribed limits. Sister Bernardine Corelli, a professed religious of the third order of St. Francis, who suffered severely from hernia, was perfectly cured by a fragment of St. Benedict's habit, and the like relic wrought the same effect on a nephew of Bernard Biggio, when he was reduced to the last extremity by small-pox. Eleanor Mattioli, being attacked by a complication of diseases, and having at the same time a dangerous sore in her neck, was given over by the physicians, but she was instantly cured by drinking some water, in which had been steeped a piece of our Saint's tunic. Her

sister had been cured in the same way, a short time previous.

The son of Mark Anthony Millici, when afflicted with incurable dropsy, was cured by the application of a relic of the Saint. Francis Musanti was cured of the same disease, by touching his coffin. Dorothea Xava, being in danger of losing one of her eyes, applied it to the coffin; it became perfectly clear, and remained so throughout her life. Vincent Buratini was instantly healed of scrofula, and Vincent Candela of lameness. Brigitta Bellocero, being lame in both her limbs, applied to them a piece of the Saint's tunic, and she received full power of them.

Two dead children were restored to life through the Saint's intercession. The first, a son of John Mendes and Isabella Strada, named Charles Benedict, aged two years, returned to life miraculously, on being

blessed with a relic of the Saint. The second, whose parents were Marcian Catalan and his wife Susanna of Sanfratello, was still-born, but came to life as soon as his mother had made a vow that, in case he lived, she would consecrate him to God in the order of St. Francis.

Octavius Pantaleon, struck with apoplexy, gave no sign of life, despite all the efforts of the physicians, who then pronounced him dead. His mother made a vow to visit the relics of the Saint, and he began to revive. Elizabeth Pernelta was cured of a like attack on making a vow to give a cloth to St. Benedict's altar. He also heard the vows of Magdeline Vasa, who promised to give a waxen statue, if her child were cured of rupture. Laurentia Vasa, on promising to venerate his relics during fifteen days, was cured of an inveterate ulcer in the leg. Rosalia Reitano, on

making a vow to enter the third order of St. Francis, was healed of a tumor. Bartholomew Craci had an ox that was lame and no good for work; he made a vow to employ it in the construction of the convent of Sanfratello, which the religious were then building, and the animal was cured. A man named Rocchi, deeply grieved at the death of a mule, went to our Saint's altar, and told his misfortune. On returning home, he found the animal alive. But passing over in silence many like prodigies, let us only speak of two miracles chosen for blessed Benedict's canonization.

Saviour Centini Capizzi, of Sanfratello, angry because some pigs had devastated his garden, took a gun to kill one of them, or, at least, to put them to flight. He loaded and discharged it, but was terrified to hear the cries of his wife and the groans of his son. Pale and affrighted, he ran to

the spot, and found his son Francis mortally wounded by a ball which had pierced his neck from side to side. The surgeons of Sanfratello and the neighborhood hastened to the spot, but all decided that the injury was mortal, the wound being large enough to allow passage to respiration, food and drink. Who could express the father's grief and agony at such a catastrophe? Happily he thought of having recourse to the Father Guardian of St. Francis' Convent, who, inspired by Heaven, took the relic of St. Benedict, blessed the dying man, and touched him with it. Immediately a great quantity of blood flowed from the wound, it closed, and no vestige of it remained, save a slight scar to give proof of the prodigy.

Philip Scalione, another inhabitant of Sanfratello, was born lame in both legs; being wholly unable to walk, if he wished

to move, he was obliged to crawl on his hands and knees, and even this he was not always able to do. He remained in that condition up to the age of fourteen. One day he heard the chant of the Reformed Franciscan Fathers at the translation of the relics of Blessed Benedict to their new church, and was filled with a vehement desire to see it. He begged his sister to carry him to the window, where, with his eyes fixed on the sacred relics, he invoked him of whose miracles he had heard so much. While praying, he suddenly beheld at his side a Franciscan friar, who said: *Walk, you are cured!* Recognizing the servant of God, the young man, animated with lively faith, tried to walk, and found he could do so, without any difficulty. With a loud voice he published the instantaneous miracle wrought for the glory of God and blessed Benedict; he went to the

road and showed himself to the assistants; never was there a more beautiful mingling of tears and acclamations of joy, than those addressed to the precious relics and the boy so miraculously cured. He related all the circumstances of the prodigy, and, by his tender acts of gratitude, retarded the procession, which had become a veritable triumphal march. We can easily imagine how much the devotion to the Saint must have been augmented. We shall terminate this chapter by recommending ourselves to the Saint, as those unfortunates of whom it is written: *They have feet, and they do not walk*, because they know not how to walk in the path of virtue and justice.





CHAPTER XV

THE DEVOTION TO ST. BENEDICT.

ALTHOUGH the body of our Saint had been placed in the common burial-ground of the religious, as was required by submission to the holy rites of the Church, nevertheless, the concourse, the homage and prayers at his tomb, as we have already seen, lasted during four months. Three years after his death, when the tomb was opened, the precious body was found intact and having an agreeable odor. On the feast of the Ascension, which fell on the 6th of May in the year 1592, it was removed to a little niche in the sacristy, on which was placed the following inscription:

*This man was really blessed (benedictus)
Before God, both in his life and by his name.
He died on the eve of the Nones of April, 1589.*

But as the devotion, which was greatly augmented on that occasion, permitted the sacristy to be closed only as much as the people wished, they began to think of removing the holy body to the church. The reputation of Father Benedict's miracles and sanctity had spread into Spain, and they there heard of the intended translation. King Philip III encouraged by his letters the execution of the project, and gave fifteen hundred piastres for the silver shrine to enclose the venerable body, which was removed on the 3d of October, 1611, and placed in the monument in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin, where, for the public satisfaction, it was left visible, yet, at the same time, protected by a covering of crystal.

Our Lord, by new graces, deigned to manifest how pleasing to Him was the honor rendered His servant. This was proved not only by the pictures, tapers, *ex votos* and crutches left there by those who were cured, but more by the continual prodigies which he operated, and the joyful cries of those who had been the subjects of them; in the church and around it, and throughout the city of Palermo resounded the praises and benedictions of the Saint.

The long road which leads from the city to that church was sometimes so obstructed by the crowds of the faithful going to implore the Saint's intercession, or thank him for it, that it was difficult to pass. All Palermo was joyful; and its people felicitated themselves on having been the first to honor Saint Benedict, and to see devotion to him authorized; for scarcely had he died, ere the city was filled with his images

crowned with the aureola, the symbol of sanctity; they were to be found in the cabins of the poor, in the shops, drawing-rooms, cabinets, oratories, churches, and even on altars. In every house his picture was venerated; lamps were lit before it, tapers burned, flowers were placed in chambers or cells which served as particular oratories, and at the foot of his statues and images they placed his name with the epithet of *Saint* or *Blessed*.

On the 24th of April, 1652, the city of Palermo, having honored Benedict with the title of Blessed in a public act, wished to choose him formally as its protector. It was decided that, on the anniversary of his death, the senate should go in state to the church of St. Mary of Jesus, and offer at the Saint's tomb fourteen torches of white wax, each weighing six pounds. His country also honored him as *blessed*; and the

people of Sanfratello went in procession before his statue and relics, which were brought with great pomp from Palermo for the consolation of his native place. Messina, Trepani, Piazza, Girgenti, Melazzo, and nearly the whole of Sicily, joined in those honors, before the Holy Roman Church had spoken of that inhabitant of heaven. This devotion passed from Sicily into Spain, when John Dominic Rubiano, a friend of our Saint, sent a relic to the Duchess of Modica in 1607. The graces obtained by this means, engaged the cities of Granada, Cadiz, Cordova, Arces, and Valladolid to honor St. Benedict. Their example was followed by other important town and villages in the kingdom. They venerated the pictures of the Servant of God, erected altars under his name, appointed festivals and lauded his virtues in the pulpit; the most zealous and learned

bishops, far from making any opposition, extended and propagated the devotion.

His fame speedily passed from Spain to Portugal, where he was designated as *the holy black*. The Christian negroes of Lisbon established a confraternity under his name, and they celebrated his feast every year with great devotion. Thirty years after our Saint's death, the truly Catholic King Philip III, assisted at their procession, being then at Lisbon, in quality of heir of Philip II, his father, and the claims of the Empress Elizabeth, his mother, to the crown of Portugal, left vacant in 1578 by the death of Don Sebastian, on the coast of Africa. In the West Indies, no saint is so greatly honored as St. Benedict.

An Indian of the town of St. Joseph in New Spain, in the diocese of Mexico, deposed under oath to what we have said above, and added: "The devotion of those

people is shown, not only in erecting altars and chapels under his name, in instituting processions in his honor, in singing his praises, causing masses to be celebrated and bells to be rung; in sumptuously illuminating the church, and in other practices customary in honoring the saints; but I have particularly remarked that in New Spain, when they celebrated the feasts of St. Benedict of Palermo, they had music of three kinds, that is, Spanish, Indian, and Ethiopian, so that the Christian Ethiopians of those parts, who, although far from their country, might say, like the captive Jews in Babylon: *How can we sing in a foreign land?* testified their joy in America by singing and playing their national music, as if they were in Ethiopia. Yet more, on the Saint's feast, there were discourses, sermons and panegyrics in his honor; I myself have made them in the port and

city of Vera Cruz. Finally, those Ethiopians, although poor, manifest their devotion by contributing to the expenses of the festivals and public devotion to St. Benedict." What would those poor blacks say of our economy regarding such things?

This beautiful testimony is corroborated by many others, given in the processes; hence it is proved that in Mexico, in the city of Vera Cruz, and again in Brazil at the Bay of All Saints, at its metropolis, in Peru, Lima and other parts of Southern and Central America, our holy negro is solemnly honored. But however great may be the devotion of the whites, that of the blacks far surpasses it. They regard St. Benedict as being of their nation, and, according to their expression, of *their kind*. Now, in reflecting on the devotion which is continually rendered to him in that part of the world, one can but admire Divine

Providence crowning the zeal of his servant, who on being questioned by the religious as to the subject of his prayers, replied: *I pray to God, and I make supplication for the Indies.*

Let, then, those pretended *strong minds* who laugh at the judgments of the people, regarding them as destitute of judgment and common sense, as fickle and inconstant, who treat their zeal as folly, and their sentiments as crude and perverted ideas, let them dare to propose to us the honors rendered to the dissolute Emperor Claudius, and with them compare not our apotheoses, but the declarations of the Church which assures us that the heroes of the Catholic faith enjoy the beatitude which God has promised to His servants. Let them, then, find in those pious pomps only error, inconstancy, confusion, disorder and vice; let them, if they will, count the nations that

venerate the holy negro, and let them admire how peoples, separated by vast distances, and living in different climes, are united in one sentiment; let them remark that it has continued and increased throughout two centuries. Let them weigh the deeds, the virtues, the indisputable prodigies on which the Church has based her decision, and examine the rigorous processes, the searching examinations, the objections urged and answered. Let them behold the distinguished personages who figure in the crowds that honor the Saint, or among those who gave their testimony under oath in the process of the Saint's canonization.

The apotheoses of the pagans were the privilege only of a noble and formidable race, of military talents, or benefits bestowed on the people. They were the fruit of policy or ambition, as Pliny remarked in

Trajan's panegyric; they took place under the auspices of divinities impure, vicious, and deceitful. But what other support than that of heroic virtue, and the guardianship of Heaven could be that of an humble lay-brother, of low birth, first a farmer, afterwards a hermit, and finally occupied as cook in a poor convent, in which he had no other prerogatives than profound abjection and absolute poverty? The pagan ceremony required only one witness who should attest he had seen the candidate fly up to heaven: St. Justin, martyr, assures us of this in his discourse to Antoninus Pius. We know that the apotheosis of Romulus was performed on the sole testimony of Julius Proculus, according to Plutarch. Now let us enumerate the processes instituted for the beatification of our Saint. In that of Palermo, in 1594, they examined on his heroic virtues, ninety-seven witnesses, who

had nearly all seen what they testified; and in the second, which was made in 1620, they heard sixty-eight witnesses: five years later there was another examination on the virtues of the Saint, in which one hundred and twenty witnesses were heard. In the year 1626, another process was instituted at Sanfratello, the Saint's native place, and although it was not a large place, seventy-seven rendered testimony in his favor. But were one to collect the irrefutable testimonies of the vices and follies of those emperors and empresses whom the pagans exalted to the rank of gods and goddesses the proofs would be numberless.





CHAPTER XVI.

PROOFS OF BENEDICT'S VIRTUES.

THE first distinguishing characteristic of the Christian, is his practising the three theological virtues, which are so intimately connected, that one is not perfect without the others. St. Paul says, that "faith without charity is dead," and St. Augustin, speaking of hope, adds, "How can one hope who does not believe?" St. Benedict's faith shone on his countenance when he approached the Holy Eucharist, that mystery in which virtue inflamed by love triumphs, according to the Angelic Doctor. To consider these three virtues united in Benedict, it suffices to recall those marvellous multiplications of bread and

wine, in favor of the poor and hungry, that food prepared by the hands of angels, and that blood squeezed from the little brush that had cleansed the vessels ;—what more calculated to renew our admiration?

If we contemplate his faith in particular, without taking into consideration the miraculous production of fishes before mentioned, we have another proof of it in the following example.

Once, when passing along the banks of the River Oreto, St. Benedict met a poor fisherman, the father of seven children. This man, who lived by the sale of his fish, had labored all day and caught nothing. Moved by the father's distress, Benedict, with lively faith, blessed the net, and it immediately became so full that they could not draw it up. Thus was renewed the miracle wrought by our Lord at the Sea of Tiberias; thus were verified the divine

promises of the Saviour, who said that faith should have His power on earth.

Let us here add, for our own advantage, what the Saint said to a professor of theology, who had recourse to him to be delivered from temptations against faith: *Father, you are a theologian and professor, but I answer you in charity, when you are assailed by that temptation, make on your heart the sign of the Cross, and say the Credo; God will deliver you from it.* The religious followed his advice, and was freed from trouble.

The virtue of hope holds the middle place. Two extremes are opposed to it, viz., presumption and despair. Let us here give an example of both, since we have had in his prophecies and promises many proofs of Benedict's heroic hope. A nobleman recommended to the Saint a very pressing affair, having great confidence in

the power of his intercession before God. Inspired by heaven, Benedict thus questioned him: *What is the state of your soul before God?* The nobleman was offended, and excusing his presumption on the grounds of human frailty and the goodness of God, was not disposed to moderate it. The saint reproached him, and added a salutary correction, counseling him to proportion his hopes to his merits, and sending him away thus humbled, promised to recommend his affair to God.

On the contrary, when a poor country-woman once came disconsolate about a theft she had committed, and said: "Alas, my Father, my sins deserve hell! I fear for my salvation. . . . Ah! there is no mercy for me. . . . If you but knew"—here the Saint interrupted her and encouraged her to put her confidence in the goodness of God; then he led her to the church,

begged a confessor to hear her, and that soul recovered the virtue of hope. Thus it was that our Saint knew how, by banishing presumption and despair, to show the sure path that avoids both extremes.

We have already remarked, in all his actions, the marvellous effects of his ardent charity towards God and the neighbor. Love, either divine or human, is always distinguished by the same characteristics. To speak frequently of the object beloved, to change color, to be inflamed, to mourn, to be offended when it is offended, to seek after it with anxiety,—such are its indubitable signs. We find all these in St. Benedict with regard to God; everything in him manifested the fire which inflamed his heart for the Divine Majesty; he spoke only of God, and his countenance often became so inflamed, that its radiance illuminated the darkness of the night. He sought God in

everything, and resented the offences committed against Him. This interior fire was so ardent, that it sometimes deprived the Saint of the use of his senses. On one occasion, some persons came to the convent to enjoy a little innocent recreation, and wishing to prepare some food they had brought with them from the city, they sent a young man, one of their company, to the kitchen to ask for some live coals. The Saint, whose heart was inflamed with fire of a very different kind, put his hands into the grate, and took therefrom as much fire as filled a vessel which he presented to the young man. It is easy to imagine the astonishment of those who beheld the action, and of those, also, who heard of it.

His charity for the neighbor led him to be ever occupied in favor of the unfortunate and the distressed. He gave salutary advice, distributed alms, often taken from his own

scanty nourishment; he gave instructions; the learned themselves received light from him; he consoled the unfortunate, served prisoners and the sick in hospitals; he blessed the fields, dispersed insects, cured the sick, and his love for his fellow beings led him even to recall the dead to life, by his efficacious prayers. Among a thousand spiritual maladies healed by him, we may speak of a young debauchee, who was the sorrow of his parents, the disgrace of his family, the scandal of his friends, and a scourge to society. Although one so deeply wounded generally complains of the surgeon, and impatiently rejects the cure of his wounds, nevertheless, Father Benedict acted with so much tact and delicacy, that he stopped the young man on the brink of the precipice; the sinner acknowledged himself vanquished, conceived a horror of libertinism, abandoned balls and dances,

and became a good son and a useful citizen; he always protested that he should owe his salvation, under God, to the good religious, Father Benedict.

We shall say but a word about the cardinal virtues, which our Saint possessed in perfection. On account of his prudence he was first appointed Guardian, and afterwards, Vicar and Master of Novices. This virtue directed his words, his designs, his deliberations. He exercised it more especially in conversation, and when there was question of correcting or preventing disorders. Being one day in company with a person of distinction, who was addicted to detraction, and finding that he was speaking ill of another, Benedict interrupted him, saying, "Excuse me, Sir, excuse me if I go now, for were I to remain here longer, I should not be able to prevent an evil which might happen." It

was easy to know what he meant, namely, that the evil he dreaded was the *detraction already begun*, and the bad habit was corrected.

Benedict's justice was not less heroic. This it was that cast him on his knees, when vicar, before a novice whom he had severely reproved, when he afterwards learned that the fault had not been such as he had been informed. But the greatest proof of his heroism in this virtue, was given when his brother Mark, having committed a homicide, was in prison awaiting the death due to his crime. Among the many persons who felt deep sorrow on this account, not the least were the Reformed Religious. It may be easily understood that it would be no slight pain to them to see a person, who, although a secular, was brother to one of their members, led to execution.

As Mark Anthony Colonna, then Viceroy of Sicily, was very fond of Benedict, the Guardian commanded him to go and recommend the condemned Mark to his mercy, and beg the favor of his protection. Benedict obeyed and went to the palace of the Viceroy, who asked *what he thought he ought to do*. The Saint replied: *My lord, although Mark is my brother, I tell you to do justice*. The Guardian having reproved him for this answer, Benedict calmly replied, that one should never ask anything contrary to justice. The Saint's companion, who had heard all, assured him that *the Viceroy, much edified at recognizing in Benedict a profound sincerity and great zeal for justice, granted Mark his pardon*.

Our Saviour has depicted justice to us in the following sentence: *Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things are God's*. These divine words

condemn those, who, like the unprofitable servant, having received talents, do not employ them for God, and live in uselessness; so that, of such a one it might be said at his death: *He had not a long life, but he existed a long time.* It was not so with St. Benedict; he lived for everybody, he made everybody a sharer in his heavenly gifts of healing, knowledge, prophecy, penetration of hearts, tears and prayers.

Justice inspired his exhortations to respect and obedience towards legitimate superiors. He felt great pain at hearing any serious complaint against the sovereign and his ministers, he closed his ears against unjust complaints, sustained authority by his discourses, showed that the imputations were, perhaps, uncertain and without foundation, or, at least, excusable through some unknown motive, and that, consequently, the allegation was unjust.

Temperance, so familiar to St. Benedict, is, according to the holy Fathers, the preserver of all virtues; and according to this sentiment, the ancient philosophers said, *The temperate man conceives nothing evil.* We have seen this in our Saint's life; but what gives a better idea of his perfection in this virtue, is the gentle reproach which he, one day, made to a religious cleric, who, in placing on the altar some vases of fresh and odoriferous flowers, was continually smelling them, and with such a passion that he evidently failed in temperance. St. Benedict reproved him, and showed him how easy it is to pass from an innocent enjoyment to a vicious sensibility. He afterwards confirmed this, when two of the religious disputed whether one could sin grievously by the sense of smell. Although this does not always happen, one may, nevertheless, say with St. Augustin: *It is a*

little thing, but he who despises small things, says the Scripture, shall fall by little and little. Now, temperance prevents that fall.

St. Benedict practised fortitude from the time that he sold his oxen, distributed the price among the poor, bade adieu to his parents, and withdrew into the desert. How surprising it was to behold his joyous appearance, not only amidst fatigue, fasts and penances, but also when overwhelmed by tribulations, injuries, and ill-treatment! The sacristan, weary at having to call him so often by the bell to attend to the demands of the afflicted, finally began to insult our Saint, and load him with injuries. On the first occasion, which was not long in presenting itself, the same sacristan, more indignant than ever, dared to call him, in the presence of several persons, *a dog of a slave*. But Benedict always preserved a serene countenance whether he

called him *an ass* or slammed the door in his face with a thousand affronts; he did even more; although he was the injured party, he humbly asked the sacristan's pardon for the trouble he had unwillingly given him. The Saint was not of a cold and insensible temperament, and if he bore everything, it was only through his heroic humility. On one occasion, a young libertine, passing from insolence to affronts, loaded our Saint with insults, which the modesty of the historians would not allow them to set down in detail; such was the violence our Saint did himself to repress his just indignation, that his eyes became inflamed, he was seized with trembling, and blood burst from his nostrils, but he kept silence.

But it was from the demons that he endured the worst assaults. Their attacks dated from his entrance into the hermitage,

and the most dangerous proceeded from the public eulogiums and homages which were drawn upon Benedict by the prodigies which Heaven operated by his hand, and the singular gifts and favors bestowed on him by God. But his profound humility, sustained by the virtue of fortitude, was always victorious over the enemies of his salvation. He himself acknowledged to some religious that the infernal spirits discharged their rage by injuring his body, appearing to him in time of prayer, and cruelly ill-treating him. Far from being troubled, he conquered them and covered them with shame. Sometimes, he was seen, when in prayer, to stretch out his hands, to resist violently, and to spit in contempt: when asked his reason for doing so, he replied: *It is against the demons who tempt us.* Such was the empire he obtained over them, that several times, during his life, he expelled

them from the bodies of the possessed. He exercised the same power after death, according to the testimony of two excellent writers: Father Tognoletto, and Father John Alphonsus of Mandrisio, Definitor General. "Not only," say they, "was this servant of God the scourge of the demons after his death (for it would take too long to relate how many possessed he has delivered, and does still deliver) but during life he operated those cures, in proof of the victory he had won over the infernal spirits." That virtue of fortitude, the mother of eleven millions of martyrs, as the Church counts, according to G  n  brard's calculation, is founded on that NO which the martyrs uttered when tyrants urged them to idolatry. That NO which the martyrs expressed by a negative gesture, according to Seneca, Benedict also said without opening his lips. His life, so just

and regular, closed the entrance to every unlawful demand. To him might be applied Cicero's eulogy on Cato:—O happy mortal, of whom no one may demand that which is evil





CHAPTER XVII.

OF THE FRUIT THAT MAY BE DRAWN FROM THIS LIFE.

THE first object we should propose to ourselves in reading the Lives of the Saints, is to render glory to God, and procure our own spiritual advantage. To obtain this second end, for the first is evident, it is necessary to compare our actions with those of St. Benedict, and to correct the great difference we find between them; but such a comparison would lead us far beyond the limits we have prescribed ourselves. Let us, then, confine ourselves to one single product of the evangelical seed: it is that, the want of which makes itself most deeply felt in our age,—it is Faith. We do not speak now to those who wholly

abstain from this necessary nourishment of the faithful, but to those who, through their own fault, have allowed it to become weak. We speak to those who should hear us, in this time when that virtue is most necessary.

Let us now imitate the holy apostles in that point in which we fail to resemble them. Their bark was assailed by a violent tempest, yet Jesus slept tranquilly at the stern; greatly troubled, they awoke Him, and with pallid countenances and terrified hearts, they crowded round their Master, crying: *Lord, save us; we perish.* The Lord awoke, and before appeasing the fury of the winds and waves, addressed them a reproach, upon which St. Basil, Bishop of Seleucia, comments in the following beautiful terms: *What then is that terror which casts you down, which reduces you to the extremity in which I behold you? Your fear*

accuses the want of faith which produces it. Troubled interiorly and exteriorly by the agitation of the sea, you liken yourselves to inanimate things which surrender themselves to the first occupant. Your bark is still on the waters; she is still intact, yet your faith has already suffered shipwreck, it is already submerged! Hence you only think *where* you are, and not *with whom* you are. O! why is not your faith strong enough to render you intrepid in the midst of the waves, and firm as a rock in the midst of the waters? *O words worthy of the Sovereign Master!* concludes the holy bishop, *He desires that faith be stronger than all created things, and that in the presence of faith the soul never gives way to despair.* When we read and reflect on sacred, and even on profane history, we clearly discover, in the ocean of human revolutions, that God presides over all, as a Pilot sove-

reignly qualified, who makes the partial disorder conduce to the general order. But very few persons comprehend this. Our mind is so feeble, says St. Chrysostom, the evils that trouble us are so great, that, instead of placing our confidence in the infinite wisdom of God, we, under His very eyes, regard ourselves as lost and swallowed up, although, frequently, it happens that a turn of the helm brings us into port. Have faith, said our Saint. The Saviour sometimes seems to sleep, but He never sleeps; He beholds the tempest, and, at the proper time, will dissipate its fury. He desires that, in the meantime, the sailors disburden themselves, and cast into the sea whatever might submerge the vessel. It is true that our faith must not be separated from hope and charity. Confidence should animate our prayers, divine love must accompany our thanksgiving for

the benefits we have received. According to the explanation of St. Chrysostom in the Sixth Homily on the Philippians, *Saint Paul does not wish that in our prayers we confine ourselves to a single demand; but he also recommends that we add thereto thanks and acknowledgments for the favors we have already received; for how can one make new requests, when he has not acknowledged graces already conferred?*

This virtue, the first among those called *theological*, should always, but particularly in our days, be accompanied by the virtue of fortitude. To obtain this fortitude, St. Benedict, after the example of the Patriarch St. Francis, especially invoked the Archangel St. Michael. And as this archangel, in warring against the powers of earth and hell, incessantly repeats, *Who is like to God? Quis est Deus?* so should we constantly confess our faith in God, fly

from the impious, from the assemblies of vanity, from pestilential discourses and conversations. If we be faithful to do this, with the help of grace, we shall merit to have applied to us that oracle of our Divine Redeemer: *Whoever shall confess me before men, I will confess him before my Father who is in heaven.*

To obtain from the divine goodness, these virtues and all others, our Saint implored the protection of the most holy Virgin, through whom, he acknowledged, he had received all graces. He attributed to the merits of Mary the prodigies which God operated through his means, and gave her all the glory of them; he referred to her all those who desired to obtain favors; to relieve the afflicted he used the oil from the lamp lit before her image. But it would be doing an injury to our readers to engage them, by Benedict's example, to

have recourse, in their necessities, to the Mother of God. Who is it, among the faithful, who does not take refuge in the bosom of his Mother?

We may recommend the invocation of the Prince of the Apostles, to whom our Saint had a particular devotion, because the Church was founded on him, and our Lord Himself prayed that Peter's faith should never fail.

To devotion to those powerful intercessors to obtain that firmness which we have admired in our Saint's life, and his perseverance in flying the venemous bite of the declared enemies of religion, let us add devotion to St. Benedict himself, to gain this precious gift. He continually implored God that His holy law might be spread throughout the Indies; certainly, he will not refuse his intercession for what we desire. We will then invoke him in tempta-

tions, doubts, trials of mind, and dangers to which we may be exposed through the frailty of our flesh.

And as our misery makes us sometimes (God grant it be not always) have recourse to the saints, only in our *temporal* necessities, making little account of those that are spiritual, it is well to recall to our minds what we have seen in this history. St. Benedict's first occupation was agriculture. Afterwards, when invested with the habit of St. Francis, we have seen him bless the fields and the fruits of the earth, with great advantage to those who had asked that benediction. In him, then, we behold another protector of cultivated fields, who will banish therefrom whatever might be hurtful to the fruits that are for our nourishment.

But that St. Benedict may hear the fervent prayers we address him before the

altar, let us frequently remind him of his good father, who brought such a blessing on the goods confided by Manasseri to his care. In the Memoirs, there is no mention of the death of our Saint's father and mother; the blamable negligence of those times has deprived us of much knowledge on this and many other points relating to our Saint. Nevertheless, prudence leads us to hope that those good parents, so pious and so virtuous, are enjoying the sight of God with their son; and what fully persuades us of this is, that, if the Saint prayed daily for sinners and for distant countries, with how much greater ardor would he have prayed for those to whom he owed his life and holy education! He will hear more willingly the prayers addressed to him in public and particular necessities, if we remind him how his father lost his employment through the malice of

others, and how, when reinstated, he caused the renewal of those divine blessings that had been suspended. Let us learn, thence, to suffer patiently the effects of men's malice, and not to doubt that we shall receive the crown of our patience: let us also hope that we shall see dissipated, even in this life, the clouds that obscure virtuous actions.

We have already seen, that when St. Benedict threw holy water over the gardens and vines attacked by destructive insects, which threatened their total ruin, not only were those insects killed or dispersed, but the farmers beheld the ruined plants revive and bear fruit. To augment the confidence of the faithful in our Saint's intercession, for a benefit as important as the fruitfulness of the ground, we shall prove from the processes what we have said, and shall choose for this end, the testimony of a lay-brother, also called Brother

Benedict. In his deposition he says: "I know that many proprietors of gardens, contiguous to the Convent of St. Mary of Jesus, suffered, according to the seasons, much loss in the fruits and vegetables injured by the worms; those persons came to the convent and begged the superiors to send Father Benedict to bless their gardens. I accompanied him several times, and was witness to the welcome that both masters and laborers gave him. Father Benedict went everywhere sprinkling holy water; I heard the thanks that were rendered him. They gratefully acknowledged, that, thanks to his blessing, not only were the worms destroyed, but the productiveness of the ground was increased and the harvests were more abundant." We may also remark, that the animals obeyed and respected our Saint, and when he dwelt in the hermitage, the wild beasts fled from it,

leaving the field free to the demons, who tormented him during his whole life.

Those persons, then, who possess property subject to the irregularities of the seasons, and the ravages of insects, would do well to place their lands under St. Benedict's protection. Thus may they hope to obtain, by his merits, the benediction of Heaven; but that they may be the more certain of gaining it, let them imitate his excellent father, who never refused alms to any one, and who, by this means, multiplied the goods confided to his care, which goods also diminished when he ceased to give alms. From this fact, spoken of in the beginning of this work, we may draw another fruit, which is, after the example of the pious Christopher, our Saint's father, to suffer the attacks of envy and malignity, and to count securely on the just recompense of our Christian actions, especially

of our effective compassion for the poor, as also to hope that calumnies shall be cleared up, even in this life.

The sick persons healed by this servant of God, during his life, were innumerable, as we have already shown. But as God, in His goodness, grants to some of His elect a special virtue for curing certain diseases belonging to this vale of tears, as we see in Sts. Anthony, Blaise, Andrew Avellino and many others, so He was pleased to attach the cure of certain maladies to the particular intercession of St. Benedict the Negro. These are sciatica, catarrh, hernia, and headache, which the Saint healed by prayer and the sign of the cross. To justify and increase the confidence of those thus afflicted, we shall quote the testimony of Father Andrew of Caltagirone, who deposed in the process at Palermo in 1594, in the following terms:

“Father Benedict laid his hand upon them, and they were instantly cured, particularly those who had hernia, sciatica, catarrh, headache, etc. Those sick persons begged Father Benedict to recite a prayer over them; he did so, and their cure was effected on the instant.”

To engage our Saint to aid us, and obtain the graces we need, we must follow the advice he gave to all the afflicted: *Have faith in the Blessed Virgin; she will cure you; doubt not but she will console you.* Thus it was, that, as we have already remarked, he attributed to the Mother of God all his marvellous cures, and concealed himself from the sight of those who were witness of the most striking wonders, lest they should refer the honor thereof to him.

Finally, we should imitate, as far as in our power, the virtues of this Christian hero. To this end let us propose to

strengthen solidly our faith, at this time when Lucifer redoubles his efforts for the destruction of the only true faith, which, despite, all his endeavors, shall subsist forever. Let us also, like St. Benedict, pray for infidels. Alas! in order to find them, it is not necessary to go to the Indies; they are around us, and may be easily recognized by their exterior: hence the gift of penetrating hearts, which our Saint possessed, would be almost useless now, since *the fool says not in his heart alone that there is no God*, but says it with uplifted head, as he looks for applause from his blinded proselytes.

Addressing ourselves to them, yet from a distance, so as to avoid their poisonous breath, let us ask them for those social goods so vaunted by the delightful system of nature, and in which they place man's happiness; let us compare them with the

benefits produced by the piety of one servant of God, of that God, whom the philosophers of our day, so plunged in the mire of materialism as to be like almost to the brutes,—dare to treat as a cruel and malevolent spirit. In fact, refusing all relations with the infinite goodness of God, they are not ashamed to rank themselves with the brutes, either by raising these to their material sphere, or by debasing themselves to the animal sphere. But, since they make themselves equal only to dogs or cows, how can they judge of the miracles which God, by means of His servants, operates for the good of the neighbor? In the system of matter, or, what is just the same, of *men-brutes*, those miracles would be esteemed only the effects of nature, still unknown. We may say to those materialistic philosophers: Your zeal is directed only to the advantage of

humanity. You attribute to nature all those precious advantages, which we Christians call *miracles*, but you are not concerned about your ignorance of their causes. In our human nature there is no lack of evils and necessities, which your zeal should made it your province to remedy. Why, then, in the wish to soothe those sorrows, why do you not seek to acquire the knowledge of which, according to your own avowal, you are destitute? why do you not employ for the public good those means, which, according to you, nature indicates? Let us come to detail. If our Saint, either by the sign of the cross or by the imposition of hands, restored sight to the blind and cured the lame, why do not you do the like, through those happy combinations which you are pleased to call natural? Why do not you go through cities and hospitals, contradicting St. Benedict's mira-

cles by setting nature at work? If, independently of the sign of the cross and the imposition of hands, it is necessary also to be Christians, for reasons of which you are ignorant, you should become such, in view of the public good, the object of your zeal. But remark that there are no true Christian materialists. Consequently, instead of restoring sight to the blind, through those causes which are concealed from you, you would lose your own. Most certainly you will not deign to reply to an historian, who is not a philosopher like yourselves. Therefore, with my equals, I go to ask of St. Benedict a miracle more striking than those he has effected, which is to give you all reasonable minds and right sense, such as God restored to Nabuchodonozor; and certainly the doing so will not be an effect of nature.

THE END.



LITANY

OF

ST. BENEDICT OF SANFRATELLO.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

O Father, who art the God of heaven,

O Son, Redeemer of the world,

O Holy Spirit, who art God,

Holy Trinity, one God,

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

St. Benedict of Sanfratello,

St. Benedict, who wast consecrated to

God in thy youth,

St. Benedict, model of sweetness,

*Have mercy
on us.*

Pray for us.

St. Benedict, who didst despise all
temporal goods,
St. Benedict, devoted to the cross of
Jesus Christ,
St. Benedict, ravished in Jesus cruci-
fied,
St. Benedict, endowed with discern-
ment of spirits.
St. Benedict, who, in the name of God,
and by thy faith, didst heal all mala-
dies,
St. Benedict, faithful observer of pov-
erty of heart,
St. Benedict, victim most agreeable
to God,
St. Benedict, ever devoted to fasting
and mortification,
St. Benedict, patron of farmers,
St. Benedict, ever attentive to those
who invoke thee in their pressing
necessities,

Pray for us.

St. Benedict, perfect lover of silence, solitude and retreat, St. Benedict, endowed with the sci- ence of the saints, St. Benedict, burning with charity for thy neighbor, Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, hear us, O Lord. Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.	<i>Pray for us.</i>
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PRAYER.

O Lord, who hast rendered St. Benedict of Sanfratello illustrious by the admirable penance he practised, and by the favors thou hast bestowed upon him, grant us, by his mediation, that, imitating his example, and mortifying ourselves for love of thee, we may, through thy mercy, participate in the glory he now enjoys in heaven.
Amen.

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